



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07487989 5

LOT 13

BY

DOROTHEA GERARD





154
ET

■

— 7 —

MHS



Longard

OTHER NOVELS BY DOROTHEA GERARD.

Orthodox.

12mo. Paper cover, 25 cents.

"An admirably written story, with a purpose."—*Springfield Republican*.

"Its dramatic interest reaches a really magnificent climax."—*London Academy*.

A Queen of Curds and Cream.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, \$1.00.

"Romance pure and simple has full sway in Dorothea Gerard's new story, 'A Queen of Curds and Cream.' The author has written nothing better, and one may well doubt if she has ever produced anything quite as good."—*Boston Beacon*.

"A very pretty and well-told story."—*St. James's Gazette*.

Etelka's Vow.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, \$1.00.

"The tale is well wrought out, and the interest is well sustained to the last."—*Boston Advertiser*.

"The author has a vivid imagination and handles a vigorous pen, so that everything she writes is worth reading."—*New York Journal of Commerce*.

A Sensitive Plant.

By E. and D. GERARD, joint authors of
"Reata," "The Waters of Hercules," etc.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, \$1.00.

"An agreeable and amusing love-story, the scene of which is part of the time in a coal-mining district in Scotland, and afterward in Venice, and a prominent character in which is a shrinking girl, whose sensitiveness is suggestive of the little mimosa flower which gives title to the book."—*Cincinnati Times-Star*.

New York: D. APPLETON & Co., 1, 3, & 5 Bond St.

131-27
DONATED BY THE
MERCANTILE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK CITY

LOT 13

Langard de Langgale, Dorothea

DOROTHEA GERARD

AUTHOR OF

LADY BABY, ORTHODOX, AND A QUEEN OF CURDS AND CREAM
AND JOINT AUTHOR OF
A SENSITIVE PLANT, THE WATERS OF HERCULES, REATA, ETC.

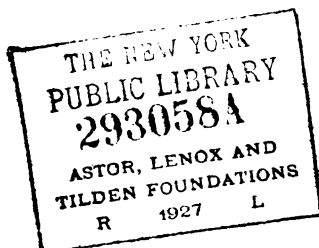


MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
NEW YORK.
M 32188

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1894

M. Sm



COPYRIGHT, 1898,
By D. APPLETON AND COMPANY.

ELECTROTYPED AND PRINTED
AT THE APPLETON PRESS, U. S. A.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—THE EVENING POST	1
II.—LOOKING BACK	9
III.—THE END OF THE DAISY-CHAIN	16
IV.—SIMON'S PLAN	23
V.—“WELL, BERNARD!”	28
VI.—MARIAN'S FIRST WALK	38
VII.—MARIAN'S FIRST JUMP	45
VIII.—MARIAN'S FIRST DANCE	52
IX.—THE CAPTAIN BEGINS TO HAVE DOUBTS	60
X.—THE BIG HOUSE AND THE LITTLE HOUSE	69
XI.—POTATO-SOUP	75
XII.—A COUNCIL OF WAR	85
XIII.—THE BLUE SERGE	91
XIV.—MR. SILKWORTH'S GOLD-MINE	97
XV.—PODSKIN	102
XVI.—WHITE CAMELLIAS	106
XVII.—“MISS MERCURY”	115
XVIII.—JESS	124
XIX.—THE FEVER PATIENTS	129
XX.—THE “BONY JOHNNIE”	136
XXI.—WHITE VILLAGE	149
XXII.—CANE HILL	159
XXIII.—THE DEATH REGISTER	166
XXIV.—THE KING AT HOME	174
XXV.—MISS MERCURY GETS AN IDEA	187
XXVI.—A MEETING	198
XXVII.—THE SANDAL-WOOD BOX	200
XXVIII.—A TÊTE-A-TÊTE	207

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIX.—THE FAMILY CONFESSIONAL	215
XXX.—JEREMIAS	222
XXXI.—IN THE "HOTEL"	230
XXXII.—THE NEW INSPECTOR	237
XXXIII.—"GOING—GOING—GONE!"	243
XXXIV.—TWO TELEGRAMS	252
XXXV.—THE FIRST GOOD-BYE	258
XXXVI.—THE SECOND GOOD-BYE	266
XXXVII.—THE TWO QUEENS	273
XXXVIII.—THE HEIRESS	283
XXXIX.—AT THE GATE	292
XL.—THE OLD PROVISION-GROUND	298

LOT 13.

CHAPTER I.

THE EVENING POST.

DINNER was over in 31 Laurel Road, and the three ladies of the party were waiting for the lamp in the drawing-room, while the one gentleman still sat over his claret in solitary state.

It was a good-sized drawing-room; one of those London rooms which have once upon a time been divided by folding-doors into a back and a front parlour, as is proclaimed by the two fire-places, and by the heavy beam separating from each other two ceilings which neither in colour nor design are even distantly related. The furniture solid but well-worn; most of the wood mahogany, and all the carpets Brussels. The ornaments respectable, but scarcely ornamental, and certainly not according to the spirit of the day. Bouquets of wax flowers under glass, photograph albums symmetrically disposed on a table, and not so much as a peacock's feather or a Japanese screen between the four walls.

One of the fire-places was filled with pink and white paper shavings, in what used to be the most approved fashion; the other—the one placed in what had once upon a time been the back-parlour—emitted a moderate red glow, very grateful on this chilly evening of early May to the three people assembled near it.

On the long, low fender-stool, with her hands clasped round her knees, with half of her brown head in the fire-light, and the other half in the fading daylight, Marian was sitting im-

movable. From her place she could just see the outline of the stunted laburnum which was the pride of the back garden, sharply cut against the sky. Often in after-days she would remember this evening, or—to speak more truly—she never forgot it, for this was the evening on which—as she put it to herself—“it all began”; and whenever her memory travelled back to this point she always found herself staring again in spirit at the laburnum, and counting the crossings and recrossings of the tiny twigs, while she listened more or less inattentively to the conversation of her two elderly maiden aunts, and while they all three waited for the entrance of Jemima with the lamp.

The Misses Honoria and Valeria Hilton were by no means fixtures in Laurel Road, nothing more than birds of passage up for their annual spring shopping, on which occasions it was undoubtedly very convenient to possess a brother-in-law in London, who again possessed a spare room, even although this particular bit of the neighbourhood of Regent's Park was in some respects almost as peacefully slumbrous as the little country town of Accrington, in which they spent the bulk of their uneventful days.

“And was it from the newspapers only that your father learned his cousin's death?”

Miss Valeria had to repeat her question twice before she succeeded in attracting Marian's attention.

“The newspapers? Oh, no; it was Bernard himself who wrote and announced his father's death.”

“Dear me, wasn't that very nice of Bernard, considering the coolness between the two branches of the family?”

Marian laughed a little.

“Oh, but Bernard never went in for the coolness. He struck out his own line about that when he was thirteen, and I quite a little girl. I have told you about his visits.”

“But he hasn't visited you of late years?”

“No; I suppose his father stopped it.”

“Well, his father is gone now, so, unless his head is turned by his accession to power, there is no saying whether he may not resume his visits. He is the only son, is he not?”

"The only son."

"Good gracious ! he will be quite ridiculously rich. Thornton is a huge place, I believe, and then there is the West Indian estate. I do hope at least that he is worthier of his fortune than his father was. What sort of a young man is he, Marian ?"

"He was scarcely a young man at all when I saw him last," said Marian, resting her chin upon her clasped hands and staring straight into the flames. "I suppose he was about eighteen or so, but I know that his visits used to be so—so *refreshing* I think I should call it ; even mamma looked forward to them. Somehow he used to wake us all up."

"There is Jemima with the lamp," interrupted Miss Valeria. "Jemima, has the evening post come yet ? I am expecting a small parcel from home."

"The post has come, ma'am, but there was no parcel ; just one letter for the Captain."

"My mosaic brooch !" moaned Miss Valeria, as the door closed behind Jemima. "I am perfectly certain that I left it lying on the dressing-table this morning. If that fool of a girl had dispatched it by the midday post I should have it now."

Marian raised a warning finger. "Take care, Aunt Val ! Where are your resolutions of taking things easy ? You'll never get plump at this rate."

"I suppose not," acquiesced Miss Valeria, sinking back in her chair with a sigh.

The short silence that followed was broken by Miss Honoria. "I wish," observed this lady, speaking for the first time, "I really wish that I hadn't eaten any of that pudding."

"Dear me, Aunt Hon, why not ?" asked Marian, somewhat startled.

"It is too nourishing ; I am quite sure it is too nourishing. I have been thinking about it, and I cannot imagine what made me take it ; I who am as a rule so particular about my diet. I quite dread getting weighed next week ; there is sure to be an increase."

"Is there ? Then I wish I had taken a second helping,"

said Miss Valeria, regretfully. I never noticed the pudding ; my mind was too much taken up with my mosaic brooch."

"What a pity it is," remarked Marian, "that it wasn't Aunt Hon who left her brooch on the dressing-table ! Perhaps the anxiety of the loss might have worried her down a pound or two."

The corners of Marian's mouth twitched as she spoke. Since the days of her babyhood her two aunts—the fat one whose ambition it was to grow thin, and the thin one whose dream was plumpness—had afforded her most excellent amusement.

"I am afraid it would take more than a brooch to worry even half a pound off me," said Miss Honoria, with a good-natured laugh. "I am always telling Val that plumpness is more a matter of temper than of food (and yet I *wish* I hadn't taken any of that pudding !) ; I can't help taking things easy, the Lord knows it, since He made me that way."

"Why, there ~~is~~ the dining-room door already !" remarked Marian. "Surely father is very early to-night."

A quick but halting step was heard to cross the passage, and in another minute a small, elderly gentleman, with square military shoulders and a decided limp in his left leg, stumped into the room.

"Tired of your own society already ?" inquired Miss Valeria.

"Is this in our honour, James ?" asked Miss Honoria, smiling her broadest smile.

"Eh ? What ? Honour ? Who is talking of honour ?" was Captain Berrincott's somewhat testy reply. "It's a question of light, not of honour. The lamp over there seems a trifle dull to-night, and this letter here is the very deuce to decipher ; I'm going to have a try at it here. There seems to be some mistake—let me see, where had I got to ?"

It was now only that Marian perceived that her father was holding in his hand an open letter which he approached more closely to the lamp.

"Eh ? What's all this about ? Mr. Parker ? Lot 13 ? I don't believe a word of it."

"Who is Mr. Parker and what is Lot 13?" inquired Miss Valeria *sotto voce* of her niece. "My dear Marian, something has evidently happened; I have never seen your father so completely off his balance."

"Mr. Parker is Uncle Simon's man of business, and Lot 13—let me see—Lot 13, I think, is the name of the West Indian estate; but I don't understand why——"

"James!" broke out Miss Valeria, in a burst of uncontrollable curiosity, "is there any news in that letter?"

Captain Berrincott lowered the letter and began by giving the questioner a long dazed stare.

"News?" he snorted. "You may call it news if you like. I call it a pack of lies. I tell you I don't believe a word of it."

"A word of what? What is it you are talking about? James, your conduct to-night is extremely peculiar."

Miss Valeria had risen and was approaching her brother-in-law.

Marian, too, was on her feet and stood beside her father.

"Has anything happened, father?" she asked, laying one small hand upon his sleeve.

"That depends upon what you call happened; but you won't get me to believe that Simon has left me Lot 13. There, read for yourselves, if you like."

And flinging the sheet of paper on the table, the Captain began stumping furiously up and down the room.

It was close to Marian's hand that the sheet fell, and with a look of bewilderment on her face she took it up and read. There were not many lines to read, and when she raised her eyes at their conclusion the look of bewilderment had turned to one of surprise so great as to be almost consternation. Silently she held the paper towards Miss Valeria, and presently aunt and niece stared at each other for a full minute, at a loss for words.

And well they might stare. The letter which had reached 31 Laurel Road by the evening post announced to Captain Berrincott, in Mr. Parker's dry, business terms, that his cousin Simon Berrincott, lately deceased, had bequeathed to him

and his heirs for ever the property of Lot 13, situated in the Island of St. Clara, in the British West Indies. And this same Simon Berrincott was the very cousin from whom a deadly feud had separated him, well-nigh since boyhood; the man with whom he had not been on speaking terms for the last quarter of a century, who had died without breathing a single word which might have been interpreted into the desire for a reconciliation! How explain this seeming anomaly?

"There's a mistake somewhere, there's bound to be a mistake somewhere," burst out the Captain, still pacing the room as fast as his game-leg would let him. "It's a mistake, it's a practical joke; it's an April hoax; that's what I tell you it is, so you needn't imagine that you'll get me to believe a word of your stupid nonsense," and coming to a standstill before Miss Valeria, he glared at her as savagely as though she, and she alone, were responsible for the state of things.

Miss Valeria, however, was beginning to recover her self-possession.

"But we are not in April, James," was the first thing she found to say.

"Then it's a mistake——"

"I don't see how it can be. Mr. Parker's language is quite plain. After all, why should Simon *not* have left you the estate? He was your cousin when all is said and done, and his son has got more money than he can know what to do with."

Captain Berrincott laughed angrily.

"So likely, isn't it, that after racking his wits during twenty-five years for the best ways of spiting me in all and everything, my dear cousin should bequeath me this mark of his affection?"

"But, father," suggested Marian, a little shyly, "perhaps that was just the reason—I mean that perhaps he was sorry at the end, and that it was as a sort of—sort of peace-offering that he left you Lot 13."

The Captain was silent for a moment, apparently reviewing this new aspect of the case; then he shook his head.

"Somehow that's not like Simon," he said, with an accent of conviction.

"And yet it's the only possible explanation," broke out Miss Valeria, in whom a species of mild mental intoxication had completely ousted the first feeling of astonishment.

"Simon cannot have been such a bad fellow as I took him for, and I sincerely regret ever having said a word against him. Honoria, my dear, have you heard the news? Don't tell me you're dropping off again,—wake up, Honoria, and wish James joy of his good luck! Oh, my dear James, whoever would have thought that we should yet live to see you a West Indian proprietor? Is Lot 13 a large place? I suppose it is very valuable, at any rate, so many people make their fortunes in the West Indies. And, of course, you will get your sugar for nothing, and as many cocoa-nuts and pine-apples as you can eat,—good gracious, how glorious! There will be pine-apples at Lot 13, will there not James? What a funny name Lot 13 is, by-the-bye! How did the place come by it?"

The Captain replied briefly that he knew nothing about either Lot 13 or the West Indies.

"Well, you will have to read up now. I still feel quite dazed. What a thing for Marian, to be sure!"

"I wonder whether I shall be able now to afford myself a new evening frock," was the first intelligible thought which after the shock of the news formed itself in Marian's mind, and she cast a furtive, half-guilty glance at her well-worn dinner-dress.

The rest of that evening was broken up into scraps of excited talk, alternating with intervals of no less excited silence. For a considerable time after his usual hour of retirement, Captain Berrincott continued to limp from one end of the room to the other, declaring that it could not be true, and being assured by Miss Valeria that nevertheless it was true, and listening with a sort of rebellious attention to glowing fancy-pictures of West Indian scenery indiscriminately mixed up with plans for Marian's future, of which her eager aunt had sketched out half a dozen within an hour.

Marian herself had resumed her place on the fender-stool, and sat once more staring into the fire, but with a very much warmer flush on her cheeks this time, and a very much brighter light in her eyes. She was not conscious of any inordinate craving for riches and all that riches bring with them, and yet it could not be in human nature not to feel strangely elated by this unlooked-for inheritance. Even Miss Honoria had shaken off her gentle drowsiness, and was gazing at James with a quite new and almost awe-struck interest. A West Indian proprietor cannot fail to be a more imposing object than a retired captain upon half-pay, and neither Miss Honoria nor Miss Valeria had ever before been very closely connected with anyone who possessed so much as a dozen acres of arable land.

Undoubtedly it was a great evening for James Berrincott, as he himself acknowledged indirectly when he gave Jemima the order to bring in the second lamp, for it was only on momentous occasions that the former front-parlour partook of the illumination of the back. Jemima looked surprised and a trifle displeased on receiving the order, and the Captain himself, reflecting upon the matter in cold blood, distinctly condemned his own impetuosity ; but at the moment he had felt the violent need of marking the occasion by something that lay outside of the everyday groove,—and what was the good of running your shins against table-corners here in the dark, when over there, across the Atlantic, acres of waving canes were waiting to be turned into golden-brown sugar, and that again into ringing sovereigns ?

It was not till considerably past the usual hour that the household retired to rest that night.

As for Miss Valeria, she sat up till past midnight, penning notes to various of her bosom friends at Accrington. It is true that she would be home again herself that day week, but a brief review of the situation convinced her that the news of the family's good fortune would not keep till then.

Yes, it was a grand evening for the Captain ; and yet that feeling of mistrust which had been the first movement of his

mind on receipt of Mr. Parker's news was the last thought to leave him that night.

"I hope to goodness there isn't a screw loose somewhere," was the reflection with which he at length fell asleep.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING BACK.

JAMES and Simon Berrincott had been first cousins, who had seen a good deal of each other in their early youth, but who had disagreed upon every single point in life after having agreed in admiring Maria Hilton.

Maria had preferred James, which was all the more galling to Simon as James had little besides his own person to recommend him, so that it was impossible to doubt the disinterestedness of her affection, whereas Simon was heir-presumptive to the very considerable family estates.

One of these estates lay on the West Indian Island of St. Clara, and thither Simon used occasionally to be sent by his father, in order to give the manager of the sugar plantation the impression that he was being controlled. It was to St. Clara that Simon retired in dudgeon the moment the knot was tied between James and Maria—not sent by his father this time, but simply following an instinctive desire to sulk, and consequently to burrow out of sight, and Lot 13 was the most convenient spot for burrowing with which he was acquainted.

Sulking alone wouldn't do it, however, as he soon discovered; something more actively aggressive was needed in order to avenge him upon the world in general and upon his family in particular for the disappointment in love which he had suffered. Accordingly not six months had passed since James's wedding when every bearer of the name of Berrincott was horrified by learning that he had united his lot to that of a

creole girl of the name of Caroline Glover, daughter of the manager of one of the estates adjoining Lot 13.

So long as his father's fury endured Simon enjoyed his new position ; once that began to flag he discovered that he was dead-sick of the girl whom he had married in a fit of spite. She was unusually pretty, but she was not a lady, and even in the first heat of his ill-temper he had never seriously contemplated bringing her home. As his continued residence on St. Clara was just as much out of the question, the inevitable result was that Simon and Caroline saw comparatively little of each other during the term of their wedded life. It proved to be but a brief term, for dating from the birth and death of a son at the end of the first year, Caroline began to pine away, and two years had barely passed since he had been rejected by Maria Hilton when Simon Berrincott was again moving in London society, again on the lists of desirable *partis*, but this time as the widower of Caroline Glover.

Probably his first experience of matrimony had sobered him, for this time he suffered his father to choose for him ; and it was in something of a hurry too that the final choice was made. Berrincott senior having had his third apoplectic stroke, thought it high time to put his mind at rest concerning his son's future—that son having already proved that his own wisdom was not to be trusted—and accordingly Simon found himself, rather to his own surprise, transformed one fine day into the husband of a moderately good-looking young woman, daughter of an old friend of his father's.

During all this time Simon had carefully kept clear of his cousin James. It was not until he had been married for close upon fifteen years that any intercourse was resumed between the two branches of the family, and even then it was by rights an illegal intercourse, tolerated but not encouraged by the respective heads.

Bernard was at the bottom of it all—or, more truly speaking, the Polar bear at the Zoological Gardens was at the bottom of it all, for if the Polar bear had not chanced to have an unusually good appetite that morning, it is quite possible that Marian and Bernard would never have got introduced.

It was on a crisp December day that the meeting took place. Marian's eyes were full of tears when they first fell on Bernard, for she had just discovered that the two precious pennies which she had been so carefully clutching had in some unaccountable manner eluded her jealous clasp, and the Polar bear was "asking for more."

"It's no good, miss," nurse was saying, "you must 'ave dropped 'em in the street. Surely you're not going to cry for such a bit o' nonsense, and you seven years old!"

"Oh, nurse," gasped Marian, "don't you think the man at the corner would give me a bun on credit?"

It was at this moment that a dark-haired boy, accompanied by a bland and butler-like individual, stepped up to the group.

"I can give you a bun," he announced in a tone which betrayed real sympathy, though likewise a touch of condescension, and he held out a paper bag.

Marian looked eagerly at the bag, then inquiringly at her nurse.

"You needn't be afraid," said the small stranger, noticing her hesitation. "There can't be any objection to taking a thing from me. My name is Berrincott."

"So is mine," said Marian, opening wide her eyes, in which astonishment had instantaneously dried up the tears.

"Is it?" and a brilliant smile broke over the boy's face. "Then you must be my cousin."

There followed an explanation, which ended by Bernard accompanying Marian and her nurse home to 31 Laurel Road.

He was passing through London on his way from Harrow for his Christmas holidays, under charge of the family butler, and unhampered, therefore, by the presence of his father.

The first step once taken, Bernard's visits in Laurel Road became an institution. Number 31 was not a specially lively house, and very likely he would have tired of it soon had it not possessed for him an attraction of its own. The fact is, that since the days of rocking horses and wooden swords Bernard had possessed a hankering after the military profession, a hankering which at home met with nothing but discouragement, for ever since he had been rejected in favour of a

British officer, Simon had never entirely got over the feeling of *pique* with which the entire British army inspired him. Who knows, too, whether, had she not been a little dazzled by the glory of the wounded warrior, fresh from the Crimea, Maria Hilton would have made the same choice between the rich and the poor cousin ?

Bernard's longings being what they were, it is clear that Uncle James and his game-leg and his Crimean stories could not fail very powerfully to attract him. The boy made no secret of his visits in Laurel Road, and, considerably to his own surprise, they were not immediately put a stop to. This, too, had its reason. Simon had not seen Maria since the day on which she had told him that she could not marry him, and though it would be stretching a point to say that he still loved her, yet it is certain that he still felt about her a keen and somewhat spiteful curiosity. To gather from Bernard's talk the details of the narrow life she now led, to learn through some casual remark that the cheek of his old love, which had once been pink and soft, was now shrunk and faded, that her bright eyes were dim, her clear voice broken—all this afforded him a strange relish.

When Bernard was nineteen and Marian twelve, her mother, who had long been an invalid, died ; and after that Bernard's visits ceased. They had always been more or less ignored, but now they were peremptorily forbidden.

To Bernard, his father's command did not make much difference ; he had plenty of other interests waiting for him ; but to Marian it made all the difference in the world, for in spite of being a Londoner she was very much more solitary than most girls of her age.

Compelled by his wounded leg to quit the army after a brief though brilliant career, Captain Berrincott had selected the metropolis as the spot for pitching his tent, principally because there is no place like London for utter privacy, and because utter privacy was the article of which he was in search. Despite his success in love, his life, taken all round, was a failure. Not only was there the collapse of his military hopes, but his wife's health broke down not many years after

their marriage, and of the five children that were born to them Marian alone survived. Strangers would describe him as crusty and even crabbed, whereas in point of fact he was a secretly broken-hearted man, very nervous about being suspected of having feelings.

Marian had grown into the sort of girl that James Berrincott's daughter could not well fail to grow into—silent, self-sufficing, and above all, reserved. She had a few acquaintances, but neither friend nor confidant. Was it likely she should want one? Even as a child she had not been allowed to cry over her broken dolls; was it likely that—supposing she had any emotion to express—she would even know how to set about expressing it? Ever since his misfortunes had begun to overtake him, James Berrincott had loathed the most distant approach to a “scene,” and so deep-rooted was his dislike to the sight of tears that in the old nursery days every quarrel used summarily to be decided by the formula: “The one that’s crying is in the wrong; the one that’s laughing is in the right.”

There were some people who declared that Marian’s face was beautiful, but even these seldom did so at first sight, for there are faces that disclose themselves entirely at one glance, and there are others that in some undefinable way seem only to reveal themselves bit by bit—to “grow upon you,” as the saying is. Marian belonged to the latter order of beauty. For many tastes her style of looks would have been too little pronounced; for neither in stature nor in colouring did Marian come under the head of what is usually called “striking.” Most people like to be able to describe a woman in a few concise words; above all they prefer her to be distinctly labelled as blonde or as brunette. Marian was both and neither. Her soft brown hair, cloudily dark in shadow, wanted only the touch of a sunbeam to appear as though powdered with golden dust. It was the same with her eyes; they were generally considered to be grey, yet there were moments and moods and angles at which something like a blue fire seemed to smoulder within them. No one so dependent on mood and light as Marian. There were days on which the slender, pale girl

with the serious child-face, the lustreless brown hair, and the quiet grey eyes might almost be passed over as insignificant ; others again when in this golden-haired, blue-eyed creature she was scarcely to be recognised as the same person. Her complexion partook of the same unobtrusive character which belonged to her entire personality—that is to say, it was not brilliant but absolutely flawless, its usual lack of colour making her eyes appear darker than they actually were.

About a week had passed since the day on which the evening post had brought such a revolution into 31 Laurel Road, and Marian was occupied in pouring out tea for her aunts under the laburnum-tree in the back-garden, for the weather had suddenly turned warm.

A London back-garden cannot perhaps help savouring a little of the absurd ; and yet only those who have possessed these thirty square yards or so of turf, these six bushes, and these three trees, know what a difference there lies between the thirty yards and nothing. The back-garden of Number 31 could boast of two flower-beds, a little group of boxwood bushes, an old hawthorn-tree and a holly hedge masking one of the brick-walls—the whole, it is needless to say, overtowered by chimneys and a good deal at the mercy of neighbouring windows ; but the pride of the enclosure was undoubtedly the laburnum, under whose golden branches the tea-table had been set out this afternoon. What if the gold be a little dimmed by flying “blacks,” and what if the hawthorn be unquestionably stunted, and what if the birds that hop around in quest of crumbs be nothing but the most cockney of sparrows ? It is a real laburnum for all that, and a real hawthorn, and there comes a moment in every month of May in which the dingiest yard that holds a twig that can blossom is transformed, almost in spite of itself into a morsel of paradise.

That moment had now come in this particular month of May, and Marian, ignorant as she was of country delights, was drinking in what she considered to be the beauties of her surroundings. As usual she was drinking them in silently, and as usual Miss Valeria was talking. It is almost needless

to say that she was talking of Lot 13. Her conversation during the last week had partaken of a decidedly tropical colouring, being largely adorned with palm-trees and enlivened by such things as humming-birds and deadly reptiles.

"At any rate there will be the cocoa-nuts," she was saying to Marian just now, "even though it has been a bad season for the sugar, as that man writes to say. There will always be pleasant little treats like the cocoa-nuts to fall back upon. Mind you send us a hamperful at Christmas."

Miss Honoria held up her hands. "Not cocoa-nuts, my dear child, if you have any regard for my wishes. Cocoa-nuts are much too fattening and at the same time much too tempting; I know I should succumb. Let it be pine-apples rather; that's safe."

Marian smiled without making any reply; she knew that none was expected of her, and she was very busy just then, her occupation being nothing less than putting the finishing touches to a daisy-chain; for there were genuine though rather grimy little daisies—as different from the plump white daisies of a village green as a child of the slums is from a rosy-cheeked country urchin—nestling among the grass.

It had been rather a hard struggle to get the poor, starved stalks to take a proper grip of each other, and the moment that the work was accomplished Marian's hands rested idly in her lap, her head sunk back against the cushion of her chair, as she gave herself up to the passive enjoyment of everything around her.

This happened to be the very moment of that great transformation scene which occasionally, though not by any means invariably, precedes sunset. The brick wall seemed on fire; the trees that usually stood there, stretching their arms towards one another over the housetops, like some forlorn sort of country folk that have lost their way in the streets, had now suddenly turned of a strange jewel-like transparency; even the chimneys were glorified by this light, so that it was quite possible to believe that they were not chimneys at all, but rather mediæval buttresses fit to play their part in a fairy tale; and as for the clouds, when Marian's

eyes had reached these they rested there and a great longing came over her to see the glorious death-bed scene which must be enacting somewhere in the West.

"It certainly is a pity," Miss Valeria was saying, "that you should begin with a bad year. I wonder whether that manager understands his business properly."

Just then there were steps on the gravel path, and Marian brought her eyes down from the clouds with something of a start.

Her father was coming round the corner of the house accompanied by a stranger. Such was her first impression ; but looking again, it appeared to her almost as though this stranger were not quite strange, as though he had about him something undefinably familiar.

She was still saying this to herself, and her father had just made a movement, when the young man, not waiting for an introduction, stepped forward, and taking her hand as it lay in her lap, daisy-chain and all, said in a voice which she knew, "You are Marian, are you not ? You remember me, don't you ? I am Bernard."

CHAPTER III.

THE END OF THE DAISY-CHAIN.

MOST young men would probably, under these circumstances, have said, "Do you remember me ?" It was characteristic of Bernard that he should take for granted that he was not forgotten, which does not however mean that he was odiously conceited. Of course he thought a good deal of himself. Considering the training he had had and the position he had occupied since his babyhood, this was indeed unavoidable ; but a certain boyish simplicity about him, and an utter absence of affectation, saved him from being either a prig or a coxcomb.

In point of fact, his assumption was, in this case, perfectly justified. Marian remembered him from the moment that she

had heard his voice. It was the same voice that had said to her, with the same self-assurance, on that crisp December day : "I can give you a bun." He was a good deal changed within these last five years. He had always been a big boy, and now he was a big man, though scarcely yet with that absolute "finish" of gesture about him with which perfectly developed manhood is stamped. Both bodily and mentally there were still a good many corners to be rubbed off Bernard. When last Marian had seen him there had not even been a shade on his upper lip ; now there was a short brown and rather obstreperous moustache, which completely altered his expression, or so it seemed to her. Somehow the moustache made her feel shy. After one questioning glance into the strong dark face above her, she dropped her eyes with a feeling of bewilderment. Yes, her first instinct had been right ; he was a stranger after all. This was not her old friend Bernard ; this was another Bernard—a new Bernard whom she had not been prepared to meet, and whom she must teach herself to get used to.

"And these are your aunts, I suppose ?" Bernard went on to say, turning towards the Miss Hiltons, and again not waiting for an introduction. "I hope you will allow me to consider myself as a sort of nephew. Considering that you are Marian's aunt, and that I am Marian's cousin, it only requires a little stretching of a point to make it all right. Don't you agree with me ?"

"Entirely," answered Miss Valeria fervently, her heart being already won by Bernard's smile. "From this hour forward I am your aunt."

"Take a seat, my dear boy," put in the Captain, with a sort of surly friendliness which with him did the duty for amiability. He was a trifle off his balance this afternoon. Bernard's unexpected appearance had given him, in a different way, almost as great a shock as it had given to Marian. In years past he had never been able to see the boy without tracing some fanciful resemblance between him and his lost first-born ; and now the sight of the man had given him a stab under which he was still writhing, as the unsteadiness of the

hand with which he pushed forward a chair would have betrayed to any close observer. Ay, just such a long-limbed, deep-chested youngster would Charles have turned into. Even the brown hair waving so freely back from the temples was the same. Surely it was hard to have but a gravestone to mourn over.

"Don't you bother about that chair, uncle," said Bernard, possessing himself of the article in question. "I'm going to sit down; but not just here. Do you know that you've chosen the very worst spot in the garden for an encampment? I see a much better place—over there, in the shadow of that wall, where you won't have the sunset-dazzle in your eyes. It's very bad for the eyes, you know. I propose an adjournment. What? A trouble moving the table? Not a bit of it. Call *Jemima*? Nonsense! I don't know who *Jemima* is, but I'm perfectly certain that I am as equal to moving furniture as she is. Just let me have my way, and you'll bless me for it."

It ended by his having his own way, despite some objections of the Captain, and despite a sort of passive resistance on the part of Miss Honoria, who was feeling too comfortable to enjoy the idea of moving even to a more desirable position. In less than three minutes' time, while Miss Honoria was still trying to collect objections to the plan, and before Miss Valeria had quite realized what had happened, the whole party found itself established at the other end of the little oblong enclosure, with only a few overturned tea-cups and some puddles of spilled cream to speak of the deed that had been performed.

There followed five minutes, which Miss Valeria devoted principally to the memory of Simon Berrincott. Bernard did not seem able to speak much of his father, but by the grip of his hands upon each other and by the painful frown that puckered his sun-tanned forehead, it was easy to guess that Simon had not gone to his grave entirely unmourned. In truth, his love for his only son had been the one soft spot in an unusually hard heart, and the affection existing between these two, the one bright side of an otherwise barren existence.

Having got through the condolences, Miss Valeria, by way

of making things pleasanter, embarked on complimentary remarks upon the deceased, and the range of only decently plausible things which could be said in this direction being painfully limited, she unavoidably found herself landed once more in Lot 13.

"It showed such real good feeling on his part, you know—such a true fund of family affection, still surviving after all these years of estrangement."

The moment that the word Lot 13 was pronounced, Bernard's expression became more distinctly constrained.

"I am afraid Uncle James will find that the management of a West Indian property is sometimes apt to be rather troublesome," he remarked hastily with as much embarrassment of manner as he was capable of.

"No mistake about that," put in Uncle James, stretching himself in his chair with a gesture that was meant to express indifference. By dint of trying very hard he had succeeded fairly well during the last week in looking as though the subject of Lot 13 did not interest him, and it was only with locked door that he read up all the printed matter he possessed concerning sugar-growing and the climate of the West Indian islands.

"These West Indian estates have gone down considerably in value since the rise of the beetroot sugar," said Bernard, turning to his uncle and speaking more earnestly than the occasion seemed to demand. "I hope that your expectations have not been unduly raised."

"It isn't the value so much," broke in Miss Valeria, "as the thoughtfulness which touched us all so deeply; not so much the *act*, don't you know, as the *motive* prompting it. And, as for that, I must say that I admire you in this matter fully as much as I do your father; it is so good-natured of you to bear James no grudge for the way in which your inheritance has been curtailed."

Bernard moved uneasily on his chair, frowned, gnawed at his moustache, and Marian distinctly heard him say, "Oh, hang it all!" beneath his breath, after which he made a movement as though he were going to jump up, but

seemed to think better of it, and instead only changed the subject.

"What is that you've got?" he broke out, casting round wildly for the nearest object that could serve as a lightning-conductor. "A daisy-chain. Let me have a look at it; I used to be great at daisy-chains in my day. Oh, but that isn't the proper way; that comes of your being a Londoner, Cousin Marian. I can show you how to make a better chain than that."

All this time Marian had sat by quite silent. It was in silence too that she yielded up her daisies, and watched Bernard's long brown fingers at work upon them. Was that the proper way to make a daisy-chain? It scarcely looked like it; it looked, on the contrary, much more like a wholesale murdering of the innocents. Marian could not get rid of the idea that this big man was strangling the poor little flowers on which he was operating with such an uncalled-for amount of energy, and which yet absolutely declined to be made into a chain.

Presently, with an impatient movement, he swept them all off his knees into the grass.

"These are not the right sort of daisies," he explained; "they are Londoners just as much as yourself, my dear Marian. Wait till you come to Thornton, and then you will see what a real daisy means. When are you coming to Thornton, by the bye?"

"I—I didn't know we were coming to Thornton at all," answered Marian, a little shyly.

"Of course you are! Aren't you, Uncle James?"

"To Thornton? My dear boy, what a preposterous idea!"

"I don't see anything preposterous in it."

"But I do. Having never been at Thornton during your father's lifetime, you surely don't suppose that I would, so to say, barely wait until the grave was closed above him——"

"Fudge, Uncle James. These are nothing but figures of speech. Do *you* mean to say that my father and you having had an unfortunate difference during life is a reason for car-

rying on the quarrel after death ? Why at that rate, in order to be logical, you ought to have shown me the door to-day."

"Not that exactly, but——"

"Not that, and not anything else either. You're coming to Thornton, and that's a settled thing. Why, you *couldn't* be so unkind as to leave me alone up there. And just at present," he added with something that was almost like a gulp, "I don't feel as if I could stand anything in the shape of strangers."

That gulp finished the Captain. In the question of the Thornton visit Bernard got his own way just as he had got it in the question of the tea-table and of the daisy-chain. Soon nothing remained to be fixed except the date and the details.

One of the details, as it presently appeared, was the inclusion of the two Miss Hiltons in the invitation. Once having adopted them as his aunts, Bernard declined to regard them as strangers, and put the finishing touch to his subjugation of Miss Valeria by requesting her to play *châtelaine* during the time of his uncle's stay in the North. She agreed enthusiastically.

"A visit to Thornton ! It is a perfect heaven-send !" she exclaimed, the moment that the retiring visitor was out of earshot. "Honorina and I haven't paid a real country visit for at least fifteen years, and we both need it ; it meets both our requirements. Honorina can do a banting-cure in the country, and I can fill out ; country exercise for her and country butter and milk for me. Oh, I think that young man is perfectly delightful ! So natural and unaffected. You never told us enough about him, James."

"It strikes me that you're pretty sure to hear enough about him—from himself," returned the Captain, with an extra shade of snappishness, being bothered by the idea that he had been exhibiting his feelings too freely during the last hour. That always was the way when that boy came across his path. "Seems to have a very respectable opinion of himself."

"Is he conceited ? Somehow that never struck me at the

moment. But I don't care ; if that's conceit, then I like them conceited. What do you say, Marian ? ”

But Marian had no opinion on the subject. “ I don't know,” she said somewhat absently. “ Perhaps he is conceited ; I was not thinking of that while he was here.”

And stooping at the same moment she lifted from the grass about three inches of a very ragged little daisy-chain which had been lying at her feet, and with this in her hand she turned towards the house. Her fingers were still tingling from the strong pressure of Bernard's last grasp, and in her ears Bernard's last words were still ringing : “ Not good-bye then, but *au revoir* in June ! ”

Suddenly it struck her that, although they were in May now, June was a long way off.

Miss Valeria stood and watched her niece as she walked towards the house, and in her quick brown eyes a gleam as of enlightenment seemed to dawn. When she turned towards the Captain, it was with something distinctly prophetic both in her gesture and mien.

“ I see what is coming,” she announced, just above her breath.

“ Something pleasant, I hope ? ” said the Captain, with a slightly scornful laugh.

“ Pleasant isn't the word for it ; it is—it is *ideal* ! There has been a deep impression made this afternoon.”

“ By whom and on whom, perhaps you would not mind explaining ? ”

“ By Bernard on Marian to begin with, and certainly also by Marian on Bernard. How can you otherwise explain the urgency of his invitation ? I confess that my breath was rather taken away by his pressing manner and words ; but, looked at with this light upon it, it all becomes as easy to read as a riddle with the clue. Oh, my dear James, there can be no doubt about your luck being on the turn ! I congratulate you with all my heart ! ”

“ Rubbish ! ” said the Captain, flinging round impatiently and limping away towards the house. And to himself he added, “ I wish all women weren't such match-making maniacs ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

SIMON'S PLAN.

IF Miss Valeria had possessed any knowledge of certain events which had recently taken place at Thornton and in its neighbourhood, it is probable that she would have had some doubts concerning her own prophecy as to what was coming. She would indeed have been bitterly disappointed could she have guessed that Bernard carried away in his mind from that afternoon in Laurel Road nothing more remarkable than the impression of a quiet little brown-haired cousin, who, as he happened to remember, had very earnestly looked up to him, even at the time when she wore short frocks, and whose society, therefore, would probably be pleasant now that her frocks had got long ; for Bernard liked being appreciated.

This was all the impression there was—all there could be, considering that another and far more brilliant picture already filled every corner of Bernard's mind. Had he come to Laurel Road fancy-free on that glorious May day, in that intoxicating hour before sunset, there is no saying whether he would have left it again as he came. But the mischief had been done before ; and in order to explain how it came to be done, a period of three months must here be retraced.

It is well known that history is apt to repeat itself. It had done so, at any rate, in the Berrincott family. Just as Simon's father, John Berrincott, feeling his end draw near, had wished to provide his son with a desirable wife, and had likewise succeeded in doing so, so was Simon himself, under precisely the same circumstances, seized by precisely the same wish, the only difference being that in the second case time was not left the father to carry it into effect—a thought which added greatly to the bitterness of his last hour ; for, though Simon was not a good man, he had managed, strangely enough, to be a tolerably good father.

It is true that Bernard was only twenty-two, and, in disposition as well as tastes, very much younger than his age ;

but just because he was in so many ways so much of a boy, the father would have liked to see him securely attached to the estate, and a marriage of the right sort appeared to him the surest means of doing this, as well as once for all knocking on the head all preposterous hankerings after the army.

It was on the daughter of a newly settled neighbour that Simon's choice fell. Bernard was away shooting wolves in Norway when the Durrants appeared in the Thornton neighbourhood. A large barrack-like house, standing in the middle of a once superb park, now considerably thinned of trees, had been untenanted for four years past, the possessors having been ruined by trying to "live up to" their residence, and every candidate for the dwelling having hitherto taken fright at the size of the building. No one had carpets big enough or curtains long enough or tables and chairs stately enough to suit these vast apartments. Already the owls had begun to find out some exceedingly convenient nooks for nest-building in the angles of the chimneys, and indeed it seemed as though they and the bats would not have to restrict themselves to the outside of the house for much longer, for window-panes were apt to be shattered by the beating of stray branches, and no one thought of replacing them.

Then, all at once, the Durrants appeared on the scene. They were armed with a thirty years' lease, and preceded by a report of their riches. There was also a report of a beautiful daughter, and the two reports, successively reaching Simon Berrincott, gave a distinct shape to his plans. People first began to talk about the Durrants' money, and Simon pricked up his ears. "If only they had a daughter, what a wife she would make for Bernard!" was his first thought. Then, when the existence of the daughter had been ascertained, came the fervent ejaculation, "If only she isn't a fright!" for Bernard was not over easy to please. Having once understood that not only was she not a fright, but that she was an undisputed beauty, Simon's mind was made up. Having reconnoitred the ground, he came to the conclusion that honesty would in this can be the best policy, though not one which, as a rule, he troubled himself much to cultivate. Mr. Durrant was there-

fore taken almost unreservedly into his confidence, and by the manner in which the retired soap-boiler received his communications, Mr. Berrincott had the satisfaction of perceiving that this seemingly rash move had been judicious.

Mr. Durrant was a *nouveau riche* of a perfectly inoffensive type, quite free of any positive vulgarity, and whose only defects were negative. He dressed well, talked correctly, and had good manners—in fact, his manners were so unusually good that people were rather too apt to observe upon their excellence, instead of taking them as a matter of course.

Having been assured by Mr. Durrant that an alliance with the house of Berrincott would be considered by him as an honour, and feeling a further ebb of his strength, Simon considered it necessary to hurry the return of his son. In answer to an urgent summons, Bernard came tearing back from Norway almost prepared to find that he had come too late to see his father alive.

"No, no, Bernard," said the sick man, in reply to his feverish greetings; "I could not have gone without providing for you."

"Providing for me?" repeated Bernard, opening wide his eyes. "Surely I am well enough provided for, father?"

"Yes, in pounds, shillings, and pence; but there are other things. I must put you into safe hands, my boy, before turning my back on this so-called vale of tears."

"You are not going to put me under a guardian, surely?" said Bernard, indignantly. "I am of age."

"It is not a guardian I am thinking of, but—a wife."

Bernard jumped up from his chair.

"No, thank you, father; I have not had quite enough of my liberty just yet. As matters stand at present, I prize it higher than matrimony."

"And higher than my peace of mind, it would seem," said the old man wistfully. "Bernard, it would make me very happy to see you married."

At this Bernard broke down a little, for he was still upset with the excitement of his journey, the strain of expectation, and, above all, by the reaction of relief. Under ordinary

circumstances he would have laughed his father's plan to scorn and dismissed it for ever ; to-day he yielded so far as to temporise.

He was ready to sacrifice everything except his self-respect for his father's peace of mind ; but where was a wife to be picked up at a moment's notice ? Here the sick man smiled a smile of delicately sly satisfaction.

"I don't think that will be the difficulty, Bernard," he gently observed. "I have been looking about me while you were after the wolves. You are not aware, are you, that since you left the neighbourhood the Monastery has got a new tenant ?"

Bernard was not aware of it.

"The name is Durrant ; the fortune seems large. There is one daughter at home, a quite young girl. I have seen her once, and—well, I can't help fancying that she might suit you."

"If she is a quite young girl, and has a large fortune," said Bernard, delighted to snatch at a difficulty, "why should she take the first man who asks her ?"

"I have reasons for supposing that she might not object to you. This large fortune, you must know, has no connection with such things as ancestral acres, but was made in the concoction of a very superior sort of soap——"

"A self-made man !" put in Bernard, with an expression which was a perfect study of disdain ; for he was just then passing through that stage of red-hot conservatism which is a phase in the mental development of most young men of his class.

"Mr. Durrant," continued Simon, as though he had not heard, "seems to be at present directing all his energies towards the task of putting the soap out of sight, and melting himself and his family pleasantly into the body of the landed gentry. From what I hear he has placed three daughters very advantageously already, and the observations I have made tell me that you would do for the fourth. In fact, I am sure of it, for I have sounded him on the subject."

Bernard had sat down again in the meantime and buried

his face in his sleeve. Now he jumped up again, more violently than before.

"So that is it!" he burst out, with flaming eyes. "It's a settled thing! In my absence and without my knowledge I have been disposed of, perhaps pledged already——"

"Bernard," interrupted his father in a tone of such sorrowful reproach that Bernard was silent.

Simon saw that he had made a mistake. It would not have been necessary to drag old Durrant into the matter. It remained only to remove, as far as was possible, all appearance of a business transaction. This he proceeded to do by explaining to Bernard that he was absolutely and entirely free; not disposed of, and pledged to nothing; that all his father asked of him, not by any means demanded, but begged of him as a favour, was to call on the Durrants, and should Miss Durrant be present, to look at her dispassionately in the light of a possible wife.

It was not until his father's failing voice had been strained for about ten minutes that Bernard was sufficiently soothed to ask, still half-sulkily—

"What is she like?"

"She is generally considered good-looking," replied Simon with a purposely expressionless face, being far too wise to raise his son's expectations; "but of course that is all a matter of taste."

It was settled at last that Bernard should call on the Durrants within the next few days, but on the express condition, as he took great pains repeatedly to explain, that this step pledged him to nothing, and that when he had seen the girl and decided that she would not suit him, his father should use no further pressure in the matter.

"You understand what I mean, father? You must not even look at me reproachfully, for that would be worse than any sort of pressure."

"I understand you perfectly, my son," said Simon, and again the delicately sly smile reappeared at the corners of his wasted lips. "I understand you, and I solemnly pledge you my word that if, after seeing Sybil Durrant, you tell me that

your mind is made up not to marry her, I will from that moment forward drop all idea of the match."

Having once obtained this assurance from his father, Bernard was in a tremendous hurry to go over to the Monastery.

"Better go to-morrow and get it over," was his reflection that night. "Poor father will be on thorns, and will keep me on them, until I tell him in plain English that I decline the honour of an alliance with the soap-boiler's daughter."

CHAPTER V.

"WELL, BERNARD?"

It was not more than five miles from Thornton to the Monastery, and Bernard, who never got into a carriage unless he could not help it, decided to walk. Having traversed about half the distance, he almost repented his resolution, for the bitter wind against which he was battling began to sting his face with a fine powdery snow. It was a December day which by mistake had strayed into March; one of those uncanceled debts of winter of which the innocent spring has to pay the penalty.

The grand desolate park of the Monastery looked, by this weather, yet grander and more desolate. The great open spaces where trees had once stood, and where now only stumps marked the places of the fallen monarchs, showed already a thin coat of snow. In the more sheltered spots among the bushes some of the very boldest of the blue hepaticas were pushing through the moist dead leaves of last year.

Once in sight of the house—a great grey, square building—Bernard's pace grew faster. Not only would it be unquestionably pleasant to get under shelter, but also there was no denying that, despite the defiant attitude of his mind, a faint feeling of curiosity was astir within him. It is not every day, after all, that a man sets off to inspect a possible wife.

Having rung the bell twice, and listened to its echo through the huge house, Bernard tried the door, and found it unfastened.

He was standing in a wide passage, which apparently ran the length of the house. The signs of a comparatively recent arrival were evident on every side. Packing-cases, both empty and full, were piled upon each other; a mountain of matting almost blocked one side; pictures stood with their faces against the wall, and carpets were as yet rolled up under tables, leaving bare the flagstones with which the gallery was paved. There was no one in sight, either to the right or to the left, but from the latter direction there came a sound of hammering so resonant that Bernard could not wonder at the voice of the door-bell having been drowned.

Following this guiding sound and turning the corner, he came in sight of a group of men and women gathered round a ladder at the far end of the gallery, and busy hanging up pictures.

When Bernard had taken this in at a glance, his eye returned to another figure which was somewhat nearer to him than the others, but whose back was turned. It was that of a lady, a young lady, as he could see immediately, and she was occupied with the arrangement of the flowers that littered one of the tables.

Bernard could see absolutely nothing of her except the curve of her shoulders, the outline of one of her ears, and a heavy plait of hair, which seemed to be very dark, if not quite black. Was it that he wished to clear up all doubt upon this subject, or was it that his curiosity, unknown to himself, had received some further stimulus? Certain it is that he mended his pace once more, and stepped out lustily over the echoing stone flags.

But Bernard was not destined to reach the end of the gallery that day. Scarcely had he turned the corner when he was already perceived, and ere he had traversed half the space before him, a footman, hastily summoned from some neighbouring region, had met him and enquired his wishes.

"Was Mrs. Durrant at home?" Yes, she was. "This

way, if you please." If Bernard had hoped to be led past the lady standing at the table he was disappointed, being, on the contrary, requested to retrace his steps for a considerable distance. If she would at least turn her head !—perhaps if he dropped his cane. There—wasn't she doing it now ? No, scarcely halfway ; not even enough to show her profile. What a strange absence of curiosity in a young girl !

The room into which Bernard was ushered was an agreeable contrast to what he had seen of the rest of the house—an oasis of comfort in the midst of a wilderness of discomfort. Too large indeed to be called cosy, it was yet one of those rooms which seem to welcome their guests with open arms. Bernard had come expecting to be overpowered by the blaze of satin and the glitter of gilding ; his teeth set, as it were, against what he was quite certain would be the soap-boiler's love of display. To his astonishment he now found himself in an apartment handsomely furnished indeed, but almost gloomy in its complete absence of the bright and the light. Not so much as a gilt picture-frame or a white curtain broke the universal sombreness.

Bernard made this observation standing in the middle of the room and looking around him. The footman had retired, presumably in order to summon his mistress. Was that Miss Durrant out there in the gallery ? And supposing it was, would she come in with her mamma ? Who else could it be except Miss Durrant ?

More than three minutes had passed in these reflections when the door opened once more, and a calm and dignified elderly gentleman entered the room, and, with a bow which was a study in itself, introduced himself as Mr. Durrant.

"Eliza," he added, in a tone of gentle reproach, "why have you not asked Mr. Berrincott to sit down ?"

Following the direction of his host's eyes, Bernard now to his astonishment perceived a movement in one of the deep window embrasures, and, looking more closely, he saw that a middle-aged woman was sitting there in an arm-chair—a dark, bulky woman, with a shawl round her shoulders and her hands lying in her lap. While he had been making his ob-

servations, was it possible that, on the other hand, observations had been made upon him? The thought passed through his mind, but faded again as he approached the embrasure. Not much danger of any unpleasantly close observation here. The woman in the arm-chair had apparently been having a snooze; to Bernard it seemed that she was only imperfectly awake now. And yet he could not rid himself of a feeling of annoyance. It is always irritating to discover that you have not been alone when you have believed yourself so.

Introductions and greetings being over, Bernard sat down on a chair which Mr. Durrant pushed forward in the most exquisite manner, and wondered what was going to happen next. Nothing happened to begin with, except that Mr. Durrant sat down on another chair and began to make most irreproachable conversation. Mrs. Durrant to all appearance had dozed off again in her corner.

Bernard had sat down with his face towards the door, and, without being exactly aware of it, was listening to every sound in the passage. It was Mr. Durrant who bore almost the entire brunt of the conversation.

"So your father had an easier night," the retired soap-boiler was saying, in an accent of well-mannered sympathy. "I understand that he suffers much from sleeplessness."

"Very much," answered Bernard, lending an ear to what he thought was an approaching step.

"I hope you did not find him seriously altered for the worse?"

"No—yes; I beg your pardon, I don't think I caught your question."

Mr. Durrant repeated it, and presently launched into civil but hopelessly unsportsmanlike enquiries regarding Bernard's recent shooting expedition. He wanted to know whether it had been grouse that Bernard had been in search of in Norway.

"Grouse in February?" gasped the young man, with his attention arrested perforce. "It was wolves I was after."

Then Mr. Durrant wished to know how wolves were caught—in traps or in nets?"

Was it for this sort of thing that he had walked over these five miles in the teeth of that wind ? Bernard began to think seriously of cutting short his visit. He was beginning to look round for his hat, when just outside the door there was heard that gently subdued rattle of cups which presages the approach of a tea-table, and instantaneously a new hope was born in his mind.

Neither was it a false hope this time, for close upon the tea-table the same lady entered the room of whom Bernard had had a glimpse in the gallery.

"My daughter," Mr. Durrant said, with a gesture of introduction, and the young girl inclined her head in silence.

Bernard had risen, but in his astonishment he forgot to bow. He was in general more, rather than less self-possessed than most young men of his age, but he had not been prepared for anything like a vision of beauty, and for the first minute or so Sybil Durrant literally dazzled his young eyes.

It was not only that she was beautiful, but that she was beautiful in a way which could not possibly be overlooked. Hers was a brilliant—what ill-natured people sometimes called a showy—style of beauty ; tall, stately, queen-like, in figure as well as movements ; a brow that seemed intended by nature for the wearing of a crown ; a step and gestures which suggested the folds of royal purple robes. And yet, despite this tragedy-queen air which pervaded her entire personality, Sybil Durrant was innocent of self-consciousness ; it was only that she was so made that she did not know how to move or look otherwise. An admirable calmness breathed from out of her ; her dark eyes were serene, her white brow was serene, the smile upon her red lips was serenely sweet. In the moment of introduction it was she who was by far the more self-possessed of the two.

"She is generally considered good-looking, but it is all a matter of taste." What could his father have meant by such absurdly faint praise ? This was the thought which principally occupied Bernard during the first few minutes after his great discovery. As yet he had not exchanged a single word with Miss Durrant.

"Sybil," said the sleepy voice from the window, speaking in deep bass tones, "will you pour out the tea, my dear?"

Sybil said, "Yes, mamma," and went towards the tea-table. Her voice exactly matched her appearance; rich and musical, without being as deep as that of her mother. The right tones for issuing commands, or ordering slaves about, thought Bernard.

It was from her hands that he received his tea-cup, and, although he was not used to drinking tea in the afternoon, he was rather astonished to find himself accepting it without hesitation. Mr. Durrant meanwhile had recommenced talking; Miss Durrant had sat down at the tea-table and was eating bread and butter, only occasionally joining in the conversation. Her hair was quite black, as Bernard was able at last to ascertain, having calmed down sufficiently to make the noting of details possible;—black as ebony and brilliant as satin. She wore it in a shining plait, which crowned her head like a diadem.

"She knows she is a queen," thought Bernard, "and she has crowned herself."

"Sybil, my dear," said the sleepy voice from the window once more, "have you done with the flowers for the dinner-table?"

"Not quite all, mamma. There are two troughs over."

"Then, if you have drunk your tea, you had better finish them."

"Very well, mamma," said Sybil, as it struck Bernard a trifle resignedly, whereupon she rose and swept from the room.

"Bother the flowers for the dinner-table," Bernard could not help inwardly ejaculating. Of course he had not been keen about coming over and inspecting the soap-boiler's daughter; but once having condescended to this step, he had never for a moment doubted that he should be able to gaze his fill. It was a decided liberty on the part of the soap-boiler or his wife to withdraw their daughter in this way from his sight. What on earth did they mean by this extraordinary conduct? He supposed that old woman in the window-re-

cess was a fool ; but why then did Mr. Durrant himself not interfere ? How long would those two troughs take to fill ? Should he wait and see ? At first he thought he would, but having sat for three minutes twirling savagely at his moustache, ill-temper got the upper hand, and he rose to his feet somewhat abruptly.

"Don't bother to see me to the door, please," he said to Mr. Durrant, and, somewhat to his own astonishment, Mr. Durrant took him at his word.

"Thank you. I have unfortunately caught a chill lately, and these long passages are exceedingly draughty. So if you will not think me uncivil——"

Bernard was already out of the door, thankful to be rid of Mr. Durrant's society on any pretext. The footman had turned to the right, and was showing him the way down the passage. Bernard was on the very point of following him with a sort of sulky resignation when a new idea struck him, and he turned abruptly to the left. He had caught sight of Miss Durrant bending over her hepaticas and snowdrops at the other end of the gallery. Somehow he had never thought of this chance coming his way. And what more natural than that he should take leave of the daughter of the house ? It struck him at this moment that not only was it allowable to approach her, but that it would be reprehensibly rude of him not to do so.

In a comparatively small number of strides he had reached the table beside which she was occupied.

"Miss Durrant," he began, a little breathlessly, "do you know that I was in a regular rage with the dinner table flowers ? I thought they were horrid nuisances, but now I have changed my mind, and think they are most charming things."

"Really ?" said Miss Durrant, raising her serene eyes from the scattered flowers with an expression of perfectly genuine surprise. "Why were you in a rage ?"

"Because—well, because I thought I was going to be cheated of the chance of saying good-bye to you."

"Oh, I see. Well, good-bye then," and she held out a

beautifully moulded hand, which, however, Bernard did not immediately take.

"Yes, all right—I am going," he said, a little taken aback at this promptitude. Was the girl a flirt? It did not look like it. She was looking at him quite frankly, and with an utter absence of embarrassment. "I am just off, but I wanted first to ask you—(what the deuce did I want to ask her?)—whether—no, what are you doing with these flowers here?"

"Don't you see what I am doing?" she answered in an accent of mild surprise; "I am arranging them for the dining-room table."

"To be sure—I had forgotten. Are you fond of doing these sort of things?"

"Rather," she replied, in a tone which scarcely sounded enthusiastic.

"Then if you don't care for them much, why do you do them?"

For a moment the perfect serenity of her face was troubled. But the cloud passed as quickly as it had come. "Because I have got to," she said in that same musical voice.

"But there are other things that you like doing better, I am sure. Do you play tennis?"

"Not much; it makes me so hot."

"Are you a great walker?"

"Well, I don't know; I take a walk every day."

"In what direction?"

The words were out before he was aware of meaning to say them. Now he glanced somewhat apprehensively at Miss Durrant, conscious of having gone a little further than a very strict propriety would approve. But Miss Durrant did not seem aware of anything offensive in his question, for she answered without hesitation, "Oh, in different directions. It depends upon the wind and the state of the roads, of course."

"Of course," agreed Bernard somewhat foolishly, and then was silent for a minute.

"Do you ride?" And to himself he added, "What a perfect figure for the saddle!"

"Not much; it tires me rather."

"But you really should ride," said Bernard, who was never more in his element than when he could give good advice. "I am sure the exercise would be good for you, and I can lend you a horse, Miss Durrant, a horse that is sure to suit you. If you would only allow me to——"

"Thank you, Mr. Berrincott, but I really don't want to ride," interrupted the girl, in a tone almost of distress. "I tell you that I don't care about riding."

This was too plain to admit of any misconstruction, and, somewhat against the grain, Bernard had to drop his new idea.

Several more minutes passed, during which he said several other things, none of which, however, was that word, "good-bye," which, as he declared, had been the sole cause of his invading this end of the gallery. Miss Durrant was giving the finishing touches to the last crystal trough. Bernard watched her while he made small talk, and told himself that it would be time enough to go when the last flower was in. Hepaticas and snowdrops still littered the table, and in the folds of Sybil's dark-blue serge a stray white or blue flower-head hung here and there, caught against the rough surface.

It was the sound of a distant door which at last brought Bernard to his senses. Good-bye was now said hastily, and with something of a guilty feeling he hurried homewards.

He was in anything but a good temper when he reached home, not only astonished at, but thoroughly dissatisfied with himself. Looking back at his behaviour that afternoon, he could find no explanation for it—none, at least, that he would accept. Of course there was *one* explanation ready to obtrude itself, and that might possibly make everything clear, but he was not going to admit anything of the sort just yet.

Simon asked no questions at first, but quietly watched his son and talked upon indifferent subjects. To Bernard the evening appeared interminable. He sat there beside his father's sofa feeling hot and cold by turns, believing, because he was able to sit still, and because he gave rational answers to his father's remarks, that his outward appearance did not betray him.

The hour was approaching at which the sick man was used to be settled for the night. Bernard had risen to ring for the nurse, but at that moment Simon's self-control gave way. Curiosity carried the day, after all.

"Well, Bernard?" he said, turning towards him and stretching out his feeble arms.

That was all; but Bernard understood him perfectly, and attempted no evasion. Possibly it was a relief to him to be done with the comedy of the last two hours.

Before answering he dropped down again on to the chair from which he had just risen.

"Well?" he then repeated, with a trifle of defiance in his voice.

"Father!" he burst out immediately afterwards, "this isn't fair upon me. It is nonsense to ask me to make up my mind after one single glimpse. Of course she's very handsome, and all that, but I've only seen her once, and—and, in fact, I can't make up my mind yet."

"I am only asking to know whether you have made up your mind to have nothing to do with her," observed Simon, almost meekly for him.

"I tell you that I haven't made up my mind to anything."

"That will do," said Simon, gently. "And now you might ring for the nurse, Bernard."

These were the last words that passed between father and son concerning Sybil Durrant. From that day forward Simon wisely left nature to do her own work. And so well did she do it and so fast, that before the middle of April was reached Bernard had become a constant visitor at The Monastery. His afternoon calls there all bore a greater or lesser resemblance to each other. Generally Mr. Durrant was summoned, and bore the brunt of the conversation, while Mrs. Durrant sat in her arm-chair by the window and did nothing.

Generally, also, Sybil, having poured out the tea, was reminded that either the drawing-room or the dining-room flowers were not yet arranged, and obediently withdrew to see to her duties. This part of the programme never failed to

put Bernard into a state of suppressed rage. It puzzled him, too : for if the Durrants were anxious for this marriage, why was the girl so frequently sent out of the room during his visits ?

Soon, however, his suppressed rage against Mrs. Durrant turned into pitying contempt. It was so absurdly easy, after all, to outwit that sleepy old woman. Sybil's flowers were always arranged in the gallery, at that same table where he had first seen her standing, surrounded by snowdrops and hepaticas, and nothing could be simpler than to make a halt on the way out, just as he had done on the first day. The process of saying good-bye was one which could be lengthened at will, and to judge by the welcome which soon began to light up the dark eyes at his approach, piercing the armour of gentle apathy which sat so becomingly upon that smoothly-rounded cheek, his progress in this direction was all that could be desired.

Those conversations at the end of the gallery always remained marked in Bernard's memory by whatever flower happened to be in the foreground of each day. Thus, there was a day that was all violets, and another that was all primroses. Most likely there would have been a day snowy with hawthorns and another blue with hyacinths ; but before their season had come Simon had a fourth paralytic stroke, under which he sunk so rapidly that the end, though foreseen for so long, took the household by surprise, and Bernard's projects, if he had any, were necessarily postponed.

CHAPTER VI.

MARIAN'S FIRST WALK.

"A HUNDRED POUNDS is certainly a good deal for new coppers," said Miss Valeria, gazing at her brother-in-law as soothingly as the width of the breakfast-table between them would permit her to do ; " at least, so it strikes me, although I really

don't exactly know what a copper is ; but you must consider, James, that it will be capital well invested. The estate is sure to gain in value. Just observe what Mr. Silkworth says : ' It is impossible to do justice to the cane so long as we have nothing but these old patched coppers to boil the juice in. '

" It would be very much more to the point if Mr. Silkworth would tell me where to get the hundred pounds from ! " snorted the Captain, while he angrily decapitated an egg.

It was the Thornton breakfast-table, at which Miss Valeria was now presiding ; for the end of June had come, and with it the long-looked-for visit to the North. For a first day in the country nothing could have been more perfect. Through the open windows the midsummer sun streamed into the panelled dining-room, throwing long squares of golden light upon the carpet and striking sparks from the spoons, and the forks, and the handles of the silver urn. A bee came buzzing noisily into the room, and, after hovering round the jam-dishes for some minutes, went buzzing out again followed by Marian's eyes. It looked so gloriously green out there ; she wished that breakfast was over.

" But, father, " she now suggested, by way of taking part in the conversation, " why should the hundred pounds not come from the profits of the estate ? "

" Because, " said the Captain, with grim calmness, " as Mr. Silkworth informs me, the estate will this year show a deficit of between seventy and eighty pounds. "

" But you mustn't forget, " Miss Valeria hastened to interpose, " that he also says that this is quite an exceptional case. "

" I should hope so, I am sure, otherwise I don't quite see what gratitude I owe to Simon's memory. I should like to know whether they pestered him for things in the way they pester me. We'll ask Bernard when he turns up. Last month it was plantation tools ; this month it is coppers ; next month I suppose it'll be new mules for the cane-carts, or else new tails for the mules. "

"I wonder whether Mr. Silkworth understands this business perfectly," observed Miss Valeria reflectively.

"I am wondering something quite different," said the Captain, who had finished his egg and was stumping up and down the room. "I am wondering whether Simon—no, it's a preposterous idea! Never mind. And yet it would be rather like him."

Miss Valeria gazed at her brother-in-law for about a minute in total incomprehension, and then turned, with a gentle sigh, to some small packages beside her.

"I don't believe you have even tasted the sugar samples yet, James," she said reproachfully. "I like the dark-brown one best myself. What do you say, Honoria?"

"I like them all equally," replied Honoria promptly. "I'll taste them over again, if you like, in order to be quite sure: but I'm a little afraid that too much sugar isn't quite the thing for me."

"No, no; by all means leave the tasting to me. Nothing could be more opportune. I had quite forgotten that sugar is fattening. There comes Bernard, just in time to give us his opinion."

But Bernard, coming in ravenous from an early excursion, was curiously shy with his opinion regarding the sugar. Neither could he give Captain Berrincott any definite information as to the average number of new implements which his father had had yearly to supply. He had never troubled his head about Lot 13, as he explained. Whether this were so or not, there certainly could be no doubt that he always preferred to avoid the subject.

"But at least you can tell us how it came by such a funny name," persisted Miss Valeria.

"Oh, as for that, the explanation is very simple. About the end of last century all the windward side of the island belonged to some awfully rich fellow, a regular Croesus. When the Croesus died, his affairs were found to be entangled, and his heirs wanted to sell the estate; but, as there was no second Croesus at hand, they had to cut it up into bits. The lots were numbered and sold by auction, and this one happened to

be ticketed with '13.' I believe the other numbers have all died out by this time, but, for some reason or other, '13' has stuck to this estate."

"I wish it had been any other number," reflected Miss Valeria within herself. "13 is not a lucky number."

Breakfast was scarcely over when Marian stole away to get her hat and to start on a voyage of discovery. It was when she stood still and looked back, just before the first bend of the avenue, that she got her first comprehensive view of the house—a fine though rambling old building, smothered in a cloak of ivy and climbing roses, and crowning a flight of grassy terraces. She walked on, wondering at the smooth sweeps of lawn, and at the royal beeches, against whose trunks you could actually lean without any danger of soot-marks on your clothes. Presently she came in sight of rolling grass-parks, in which cattle and sheep and superannuated ponies—ponies on which Bernard had learnt to ride in days gone by—were peaceably feeding.

It was late in the forenoon when, on an old stone bridge that crossed a briskly-flowing stream, she at last stood still, and drew a deep breath. Yes—certainly this was better than the back-garden at 31, Laurel Road.

Marian had no watch with her, and she now began to wonder whether it would not take her all her time to get back to the house before luncheon. Over there to the left, on an open space among some elms, she could see something of an irregular shape and masked in creepers; she would just go a little nearer and ascertain whether it was a "real live ruin," as she put it to herself, and then she would return to investigate it some other day.

Drawing nearer between the elms, she perceived that it was not only a ruin, but evidently the ruin of a chapel, of which the roofless walls were still standing very nearly intact, but so thickly covered with creepers that even the windows were closely curtained. What had once been the door had been replaced by a gate in fine iron-work; it was closed, apparently, but nothing could be easier than to gather a comprehensive view of the interior by a glance between

those delicate twisted scrolls. Marian had just made up her mind to this, when, to her astonishment, the gate opened and Bernard came out.

He did not perceive her immediately, but walked slowly towards her, his head sunk on his breast, his hands in his pockets. It was not until he was within a few paces of her that he looked up.

"You here!" he said, in genuine surprise, and, as it seemed to Marian, with some annoyance.

"I didn't know," she stammered guiltily; "I didn't mean to disturb you."

For some reason or other she felt that she was in the way.

But the cloud on Bernard's brow was already dispersing.

"Nonsense; you are not disturbing me, my little cousin! It's no secrets I'm after, so you needn't look as scared as though you had caught me red-handed from a murder. Come—I will show you what I have been doing."

He turned, and, followed by Marian, walked back towards the ruin.

Entering by the iron gate and stepping over the grass-grown threshold, Marian now perceived that the roofless chapel had been turned into a burying-ground. Carefully kept as it was, with well-shorn grass and well-tended evergreens, and protected by the green-mantled walls, it would have been hard to find a more ideal place of rest.

Bernard led the way to the further end, and then stood still beside what appeared to be a recently-placed tombstone. Marian read the name of Simon Berrincott under the Berrincott arms.

"This is his wedding-day," said Bernard, speaking rather lower. "It was that that made me look in here as I was passing. And it's not an ordinary wedding-day, either. If he and my mother had lived this would have been their silver wedding. They were married on June 29th, 1859. You can see it on the stone there."

Marian's heart was swelling with sympathy; but in spite of this, or perhaps because of this, she was at a loss what to say. She had never learnt how to express herself, and now

the words would not come. It was with a great effort that she managed at last, merely for the sake of saying something, to remark—

"I thought your father had married at the same time that my father did?"

"That was the West Indian marriage. My father was married twice, you know. His first wife was a West Indian, but she died very soon."

"Oh, I see!" said Marian, and was silent again.

She remembered now indistinctly having heard something about this short-lived and long-buried chapter in the history of Uncle Simon, and she wished now that she had not made that remark, for to judge from Bernard's tone the "West Indian marriage" was evidently a somewhat sore subject.

There followed a minute of silence, which Marian longed to break and did not know how. Then Bernard turned abruptly towards her.

"Marian," he said, in a different tone, "do you know that my father loved your mother?"

"No!" she answered in boundless astonishment, while she felt the blood burning in her cheeks. "I never knew that."

"Neither did I until quite lately. If it hadn't been for some old letters I came across after my father's death I don't suppose I ever should have known it."

They had turned now and were walking towards the entrance.

"So by rights we should have been brother and sister," said Bernard as he closed the gate. "You have always been a good little sister to me, Marian," he added in a tone which suggested good-natured patronage; "ever since the day when you wanted a bun for the polar bear. Do you remember?"

"I remember," said Marian with a slight and unaccountable sinking of the heart. Could she have any higher ambition than that of being a "good little sister" to Bernard?

"But this won't do," said Bernard, giving himself a shake.

"An hour to luncheon-time and just heaps of things waiting for me."

"What kind of things?" asked Marian, glad of a change of subject.

"Come along with me, and you'll see. Powell's farm is my first point. That man understands nothing at all about the rearing of pigs, and he's as obstinate as a mule himself."

"And do you rear pigs yourself?"

"I? Oh, no; I haven't got time to bother about that. But I have read up the subject, and am trying to get him to adopt the foreign system, which answers twice as well, as is statistically proved. But what's the use of talking to a man who has never read a printed page on the subject?"

Again Marian had no reply to make. Her nature was truthful to excess—if such a thing can be—and despite her deep admiration for her cousin, the idea *would* obtrude itself that possibly, after all, Mr. Powell, unlettered though he was, knew more about pig-rearing than Bernard. Failing the courage to suggest this, she saw no alternative but to hold her tongue.

Fortunately she could do this with perfect impunity, for Bernard, once launched upon the subject of his intended farm and agricultural reforms, had so much to say that he did not even notice her silence. An interested though somewhat puzzled witness, she assisted at his conversation with Mr. Powell, as well as at various other conversations which he had with various others of his tenants and dependents in the course of their homeward way. It appeared that Mr. Powell's pigs were not by any means the only things occupying Bernard's mind at present. There was another farmer named Bryce, to whom quite a liberal amount of good advice was given concerning a new disposition of his fields; then a slight *détour* had to be made in order to enquire after a cottager's sick child, whose tongue had to be coaxed out of his mouth in order to be personally inspected by the "Maister"; after which there followed an episode with a carter whose attire, for some reason, fell short of the required standard, and who was therefore wrathfully hailed on midroad.

It was not until Marian's feet were beginning to drag rather heavily, and she herself to feel somewhat faint with hunger, that they reached the house half an hour late for luncheon.

CHAPTER VII.

MARIAN'S FIRST JUMP.

THE next six weeks were the happiest that Marian had ever known. She had never been in the country for so long at a time, and enjoyed it now to her heart's content. Matters so shaped themselves that she was Bernard's almost constant companion. He always had a great many things to look after, and it suited him to have someone to talk to while he was making his rounds. Marian's experience on that first day proved to be but the first link in a long chain of similar experiences. At this time Bernard might have been likened to a young king, who for the first time was testing his power. At first sight of all the possibilities lying within his reach, a young man of Bernard's stamp is rather apt to lose his head and to rush at them all indiscriminately. Since the intense vitality within him had got to be worked off by some means, it took to working itself off in what he considered to be the duties of an English landlord. His brain was positively teeming with plans. He was going to build model cottages, to import steam-ploughs, to have all the carters on the estate equipped alike in old-English smock-frocks (which, for some incomprehensible reason, the carters objected to); then of course he was going to go into Parliament, the only difficulty in that direction being that he had not yet made up his mind as to his line of politics. He had believed himself an ultra-Conservative till now; but since he had taken to putting his finger into every pie in every cottage for five miles around, he had begun to see peculiar charms in the position of people's advocate.

Under these circumstances a sympathiser, into whose ear he could pour his plans, hatched, unhatched, and half-hatched,

was the very thing that Bernard required, and Marian was a good listener, which peculiarly fitted her for the position. The thought that this constant companionship might disturb her peace and arouse hopes which he had no idea of fulfilling never once crossed his mind.

Despite his excellent opinion of himself, Bernard was not vain, in the ordinary sense of the word; but even had the thought occurred to him it would most likely not have affected his conduct. She was useful to him, therefore he made use of her; for his was a nature in which egotism had been carefully fed large.

Whether Marian was building any castles in the air on the strength of these walks and talks, there is no doubt that Miss Valeria was doing so. The Captain himself saw nothing, being far too gravely occupied by his correspondence with Lot 13, and by the reports which came by every mail. About this time, too, there was an offer from a would-be purchaser of the estate for six hundred pounds, a sum which made Miss Valeria turn pale with indignation, and which the Captain, despite all he had to say about the bother of West Indian plantations, rejected with withering scorn.

During all this time the party at Thornton lived in absolute seclusion. Not only were they in deep mourning, but most of Bernard's neighbours were still in London. Once, in taking a short-cut through a neighbouring park, Marian caught sight of a big, barrack-like house and asked who lived there.

"Some people called Durrant," said Bernard rather shortly, "but they are not back yet."

It was not until Marian's visit had drawn almost to a close, and the boxes were being packed for departure, that an incident took place which remained ever after fixed in her mind as a landmark in her life.

Amongst other ways of amusing himself, Bernard had hit upon the plan of teaching Marian to ride. She had never been on a horse before, was not used to horses and felt distinctly nervous at the idea of even approaching one. Seeing, however, that Bernard had set his heart upon it, and trembling

a little at the idea of being despised by him, she determined to conquer her weakness, and succeeded so well that before six lessons were over she had the satisfaction of hearing Bernard commend not only other progress, but also her pluck. When he came to the pluck she could almost have burst out laughing. Was it really possible that no one had ever guessed at her secret agonies? At the chills of fear which would run over her as she stood on the door-steps, waiting for her steed? At the sigh of relief that would escape her lips when at the end of the ride her foot once more touched solid ground? Had she really played her part so well as to deceive them all? "What an actress I must be!" said poor Marian to herself. It never occurred to her to look for the secret of this curious success in the strength of that self-control which the whole surroundings of her childhood had served to train in so unusual a manner.

It was drawing near to sunset one evening when Bernard and Marian were slowly crossing a field, their horses' heads towards Thornton, after what was to be one of their very last rides that summer. The field was enclosed by low hedges, and it was towards the gate at the further end that they were wending their way. Suddenly the wide-spread evening stillness was broken by the rattle of hoofs and the approaching rumble of wheels, and along the glaring white road beyond the hedge a victoria with two ladies in it came bowling along.

"It is the Durrant's carriage," said Bernard, standing up in his stirrups. "I didn't know they were back. By cutting over that corner I may intercept them. Here goes!"

He was all but off when a reproachful murmur of "Oh, Bernard!" reached his ear, and he remembered his cousin. What, in the name of all the botherations, was he to do with her at this most critical juncture? To leave her to her fate was certainly not the thing; how would it do to take her with him? She had never before taken the smallest jump on horseback, but she would have to begin some time or other, and this hedge was the very thing for a first attempt.

"I must absolutely speak to Mrs. Durrant," he hastily explained to Marian, "and I can only do so by clearing the

hedge there in the corner. It's a very easy jump ; I believe you could do it. Will you come with me, or do you prefer to wait for me here ? ”

“ Of course I will come with you,” said Marian, setting her teeth. “ Tell me what to do and I will take the jump.”

A few hurried directions from Bernard, a hasty settling of reins and skirts, some breathless moments during which the evening air seemed to be rushing audibly past her ears, and then Marian experienced the roughest jolt she had ever undergone in her short existence, realised to her surprise that she was still in the saddle, that the hedge was cleared, and that Bernard was saying, “ Well done, little cousin ! ” in a tone of approval.

They had landed only some dozen yards in front of the approaching carriage. By the time Marian had begun to collect her scattered senses she perceived that the carriage was standing still, and that Bernard was deep in conversation with the occupants. An introduction followed, during which Marian still struggled for breath, and then only did she become aware of a pair of black eyes fixed very earnestly upon her face. They were Miss Durrant's eyes, and they appeared to be watching her with so close an attention that she began to wonder whether her hat was sitting crooked or her collar had moved out of its legitimate position. As she drew close to the side of the carriage these questions vanished in pure astonishment. Miss Durrant's face struck her as by far the most beautiful thing she had ever seen in her life. Sybil, in a creamy gown and hat, with no colour about her except what glowed on her cheeks and lips, was indeed irresistibly beautiful ; and the sight of anything beautiful was always a keen enjoyment to Marian. But to-day the enjoyment was mixed with a sense of restlessness which she was at a loss how to explain. For some reason, impossible for her to analyse, it disturbed her to see her cousin Bernard leaning from the saddle in this fashion. Moreover the imperturbable calmness of Miss Durrant's face only served all the more to accentuate the uneasiness of her own state of mind.

It was not until just before parting that the two girls ex-

changed a few words. Bernard was rattling off some civilities to Mrs. Durrant, who, as usual, had appeared to be snoozing, when Sybil, turning towards Marian rather more suddenly than she was in the habit of moving, said in a lowered voice :

"How delightfully pleased you must feel with yourself, Miss Berrincott !"

"What about ?" asked Marian, a little surprised.

"Why, about the jump, of course. Mr. Berrincott says it is the first you have ever taken. And you *were* afraid, were you not ? Please tell me whether you felt at all afraid ?"

"I believe I was a little nervous when the idea was first suggested——"

"And yet you took it ; oh, how I admire you—and envy you !"

"Me ? Oh, please don't ! That quite bewilders me. But what made you guess that I had been nervous ? It isn't written large on my forehead, is it ?"

"Not for other people's eyes ; but I myself am a coward, so I have an instinct in these things. Even if I never see you again I shall always think of you as a sort of heroine."

"And I of her as a beauty," was Marian's parting reflection. Miss Durrant's face pursued her for the rest of that evening. "How beautiful, oh, how beautiful she is !" was the thought which left her no peace.

On the following afternoon, Bernard, saying no word to any one, walked over to the Monastery. Being in especial luck he came across Sybil wandering by herself among the tree-stumps, which was distinctly better even than the meetings in the gallery. She was a shade more pensive than usual to-day, or so it struck Bernard. Was it possible that anything in the shape of an anxiety was weighing on her generally so serene mind ?

Five different subjects of conversation had fallen flat to the ground, when Bernard, for want of a better topic, began to talk of his guests' impending departure. Somewhat to his astonishment this had the effect of completely rousing Sybil from her abstraction.

"So Miss Berrincott is also going away?" she inquired walking along by Bernard's side. Then before he could answer, "Do you know," she said, turning to him on what seemed to be an impulse, "do you know that she is worth ten of me?"

"That she certainly is not," said Bernard hotly. "What in the name of wonder are you talking about? Marian is a very good little girl, very good-natured and all that sort of thing——"

Sybil laughed—a rich low laugh. "How blind men are! The idea of talking of her as a good little girl! She may be that too; but I tell you that that little girl is capable of doing big things. I am not quite sure whether she isn't a heroine."

Now it was Bernard's turn to laugh. "Oh, come, this is getting just a shade too rich for me. Perhaps you would kindly point out to me some of her heroic deeds?"

"I can only point out one as yet—that jump she took yesterday."

"That whipper-snapper hedge? Surely you are not serious?"

"Yes, that whipper-snapper hedge. To you it was a whipper-snapper hedge, but don't imagine it was anything of the sort to her. She was quite prepared for death when she turned her horse's head towards that corner. In fact, I incline to the belief that she never goes out riding with you without being quite prepared for death."

"But why, then, in the name of all that is incomprehensible, does she ride?"

Sybil shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps she does it to oblige you; and very likely it is in order not to spoil your enjoyment that she doesn't let you see how frightened she is. That is why I admire her so much, and that is why I say that I never could do the same as she does."

Bernard walked on for some moments in silence.

"You must be mistaken," he said at last, "I'm sure Marian has got plenty of pluck; the ordinary sort of pluck, I mean."

"That depends on what you call pluck ; whether you mean not feeling afraid, or overcoming one's fear. In the second sense she's got heaps of pluck—in the first sense none. I know I'm not mistaken. One requires to be a coward oneself in order to have the proper fellow-feeling in these matters."

"Which is equivalent to saying that you cannot possess an atom of any such fellow-feeling," cried Bernard, measuring the queen-like figure beside him with a glance of glowing approval. "No, no, Miss Durrant, something has been throwing dust in your eyes ; I stick to my first proposition ; Marian is a good little girl, but quite the ordinary, everyday sort, whereas you——"

"I am a fraud," said Sybil quickly, and with almost a touch of impatience. "Never expect anything in the heroic line from me, and never tax my courage, either physical or moral. I know I don't look like a coward, but I am a fraud and I can't alter it."

They had reached the house by this time, so that these words were the last of private talk which passed between Bernard and Sybil that day. They pursued him on his homeward way, and might very likely have continued to occupy him in the course of the evening, had he not, on his return home, found a fresh subject of interest waiting to be discussed.

The afternoon post had come, bringing with it the West Indian mail.

"And there is such bad news again," said Marian, who met him in the hall with a scared face. "A hurricane has blown down the chimney of the sugar works, and there is a disease among the mules. Poor father is beginning to be at his wits' ends. And, oh, Bernard, only fancy, he says that it will probably end with his having to go out to Lot 13 himself to look into matters, and if he goes, of course I cannot let him go alone."

"You would enjoy the trip, would you not ?" said Bernard, a little absently, while he hung up his hat.

"I ?" repeated Marian, almost indignantly. Then she

appeared to recollect herself and added very deliberately :
" Oh, yes, of course I would enjoy it ; but I hope we will not go before the winter."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIAN'S FIRST DANCE.

ALONG the uneven pavement of the Southampton landing-place a four-wheeled cab rattled and jingled dismally one dark winter's day. It was Marian who peered through the blurred glass, asking herself the while whether the fog really was so thick, or whether there was anything in her eyes which yet further augmented the indistinctness of outlines in general. If there was it certainly was most foolish and unjustifiable, seeing that a three months' trip to St. Clara seemed distinctly to belong to the class of pleasure excursions. Captain Berrincott himself preferred to view the matter from a strictly business point of view. Earthquakes, floods, free fights among the negroes, a plague of cockroaches, a general rise of the beetroot sugar, such were only a few of the causes underlying the thread of complaint which ran through each and all of Mr. Silkworth's letters, and which had ended by deciding the Captain to go out and look at things for himself.

Marian had spent the last fortnight in a strange, incongruous sort of whirl ; buying whatever summer-gowns she could find left over from last season, and hunting up parasols and shady hats, which she got half-price, by reason of their being past their first freshness. Her mind was divided between eager curiosity and some other feeling which made it very hard to go so far away. She did not really know how hard until the last day came, and to her astonishment a hansom drew up at the door with Bernard in it. He happened to be in London, he explained, and so, of course, could not think of letting them go off by themselves. The Captain protested, but not very vigorously ; for, despite the indifference which he

ostentatiously displayed, the old gentleman was not inconsiderably flurried by the preparations for his voyage, and Bernard, as usual, had his way, and so it happened that he was the third occupant of the cab which jingled and rattled along Southampton pier.

By the time that among all the forest of masts and funnels the right funnel had been hit upon, it had grown to be late in the afternoon. On the broad, white deck, breathing an atmosphere that was a mixture of fresh paint and salt-laden haze, the three stood together, looking about them in the gathering dusk. They were but one of many groups. Parting messages and final injunctions were being more or less feverishly repeated on all sides. Everybody seemed to be talking at once, and a large assortment of pocket-handkerchiefs was visible. The only person who seemed to have no good-byes to say was a tall, clean-shaved, light-haired man, standing alone by the head of the cabin stairs, his arms folded and his hat pulled over his forehead. Three or four times, in looking that way, Marian had met the gaze of a pair of somewhat chilly blue eyes, and had at last turned her face another way, with a faint feeling of unrest.

There was not much conversation in this group. Even Bernard was rather conspicuously taciturn and principally occupied with boring the point of his stick into the coil of rope which came handiest. It was not until the last moment, when bells were being rung, fog-horns blown, and the sound of choky good-byes was buzzing through the air, that he seemed to have come to some decision from which he had hitherto hung back.

"Look here, Uncle James," he said hurriedly, turning once more after the last handshake of all, "I think you're quite right to go out; but when you've seen the thing, take my advice and sell it for whatever it will fetch. Good-bye, Marian, and mind you enjoy your tropical experiences."

"But, my dear boy," began the Captain in amazement; but Bernard was over the bridge already and waving his hand to them from the pier.

This was the moment at which a certain uncomfortable sensation which during the last half-hour had been busy at Marian's throat became acute.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she muttered, just above her breath. "Oh, how long those three months look!"

The words were on her lips as she turned away. In the same instant she passed her handkerchief impatiently across her eyes. It was almost too dark to see distinctly, and yet she had the unmistakable sensation of being watched. That tall figure at the head of the cabin stairs had not altered its position.

Over the details of the next few days it will be wisest to cast a merciful veil, while, as regards the rest of the voyage, a few extracts from Marian's first letter home will do to begin with. "Dear Aunt Val," she wrote on February 10th, "this is the first day on which an inkstand can be got to stand straight, so you see that I have lost no time. The ship is not full, but there are some pleasant people on board. Most of the men are commercial travellers, though there are some others, for instance a Mr. Hibbert, who has lived for nearly fifteen years on one of the small outlying islands off St. Clara, where he has got some government appointment. He is the tallest and scraggiest man I have ever seen, and his chin is quite out of drawing. But I don't want to say anything unkind about him, for there is something about the man that makes me feel sure that he is unhappy." On February 13th the following addition was made to the letter :—

"I am writing this with my grey print frock on, and the first flying-fish have been seen. The water is so blue that one cannot help fancying that if one dipped a paint brush in it it would paint bright blue. We are leading a very gay life on board ever since it got smooth. Mr. Hibbert is quite determined to get up a dance for to-morrow—Valentine's day. I rather wonder at him, for he seems quite elderly (at least forty, I should think) and generally very silent. I should never have thought that dancing was in his line. The band is to consist of a banjo, two tin whistles, and a fife."

"I see something coming," was the remark with which Miss

Valeria folded up the letter containing the above passage, when, in course of time, it reached her hands.

"You always see something coming," replied Miss Honoria, with her comfortable laugh. "You made that identical remark when Bernard paid his first visit in Laurel Road, and that was nine months ago."

But Miss Valeria was of far too irrepressible a nature to be damped by any sarcasm which Miss Honoria was capable of wielding. In point of fact she scarcely heard her, her thoughts being well forward already on the road of this her newest discovery. She remembered now having often heard that sea-voyages presented numberless opportunities for agreeable acquaintances being formed, and were particularly favourable to people with "serious intentions."

"Forty is a little much, certainly ; but then Marian is such a serious girl for her age. And of course he would need to get some home appointment."

"But, my dearest Val, she talks of him as 'scraggy,' and says that his face is out of drawing. Surely that doesn't look like being very desperately smitten."

"It is precisely from these remarks that I have drawn my deductions," replied Miss Valeria, with a ring of triumph in her tone. "What she says is quite sufficient to show that an impression has been created, though I admit that this impression will require to be modified by time. That which she now calls "scragginess" will in all probability have turned into an "elegant slimness" by next letter, and instead of his profile being out of drawing, she will have discovered that his features belong to the marked and interesting order."

By the time these remarks were made the St. Valentine's Day dance was a thing of the past. Marian had enjoyed it in spite of herself, and, as was her invariable habit in moments of enjoyment, had fallen into an almost complete silence.

"What are you thinking of?" her partner had asked her abruptly, while during one of the pauses in the entertainment they leaned over the side of the ship, gazing at the dark water below. It was the same Mr. Hibbert with regard to whom

Miss Valeria was subsequently to observe that she saw something coming. Standing now bareheaded in the starlight, his sharply protruding chin assumed an outline that was all but grotesque. Upon his thin, clean-shaven face the skin lay in wrinkles that were obviously premature, and what with this, as well as the sunken look about a nervous haggard mouth, added to his unusual height, the man was unpleasantly conspicuous wherever he went. His narrow shoulders and the slight stoop with which he carried himself gave him a somewhat consumptive appearance. In point of fact he was not consumptive, and the stoop was the result of an instinctive desire to appear a little less tall than he was. Most people who spoke to him for the first time were agreeably surprised to find that he had no difficulty in looking them in the face. His pale blue eyes might have something chilly in their gaze, but nothing underhand.

At sound of his abrupt question Marian roused herself.

"I was thinking how strange it was that I should have danced my first proper quadrille in the middle of the Atlantic."

"Then you have never been at a ball before?"

"Never. I am to go out next season, I believe. Bernard has persuaded papa."

"Who is Bernard?"

"Bernard? Oh, Bernard is my cousin."

And again Marian leant over the side of the steamer, and there was silence for some minutes.

It was very quiet here at the back of the ship where they were standing, and had it not been for the mingled smell of engines at work and of hot niggers which pervaded the atmosphere, the peacefulness would have very nearly deserved to be described as idyllic. This was the first perfect tropical night that they had yet enjoyed. Now and then some flying-fish skimmed over the surface, their wet wings catching the white light, to sink again silently into the motionless water.

"Tell me," said Mr. Hibbert after a long pause, during which the subdued sound of voices and laughter rang toward

them over the deck, "was that your cousin Bernard who came to see you off?"

"Yes, that was he. How do you know?"

Mr. Hibbert laughed faintly.

"I don't know; I only guessed." He was silent for a moment, and then added, "It must be pleasant to have somebody, to see one off."

"Had you nobody? Oh, no! I remember now; you were standing at the head of the cabin stairs."

"You observed me, then?"—this a little more quickly.

"I—well, yes, I couldn't help observing you." How was she to explain to him that he was the sort of person whom it was quite impossible to overlook?

"Of course you couldn't help observing me," said Mr. Hibbert, with a touch of bitterness. "I was forgetting."

"Why did you not have a brother or a cousin to see you off?" went on Marian, by way of turning the conversation.

"I have not got either a brother or a cousin."

"Or a friend?"

"I don't deal very largely in friends."

"Oh!" said Marian, and then held her tongue, afraid of having stumbled upon an awkward subject.

"You were sorry to say good-bye to him, were you not?" said the smooth, flat voice beside her.

There was nothing to indicate who was meant by the "him," and yet Marian turned with a guilty flush on her cheek.

"What do you mean? I never said I was sorry; and of course one is always sorry to say good-bye to any of one's relations. I have known Bernard since I was seven years old."

"Have you indeed?" said Mr. Hibbert, unperturbed. "That is a long time, certainly. I suppose it must be at least ten years since you were seven years old. There is the music tuning up again. Shall we return to mingle with the festive crowd? You know that you have promised me the next round dance."

It was two days later at four in the morning that Marian's eyes first saw land. Mr. Hibbert had procured for her the necessary permission for taking up her station on the bridge while the ship wended its way towards the harbour between the many little islands that lie scattered around St. Angela's. The moon was still shining brightly when she emerged on the bridge. Up here the noise of the engines was no more than a subdued throb, and by far the most pronounced sound was a rising and falling swish of water as the steamer's head rocked towards the entrance of the strait. With every roll of the ship the outlines of the black jagged rocks on each side altered with the rapidity of grimacing faces. From some point ahead a flare burnt up out of the darkness, a little further on another—small fishing-boats afraid of being run down, as Mr. Hibbert explained to Marian. As slowly they issued from between the islets, a feeble line of dawn had started up along the horizon, though the white moon still hung in the sky. They passed the fishing-boats a little to the left. By the immobility of the black silhouettes, whose invisible faces were turned towards them, it was easy to see that the men had paused in order to watch the passing ship. In ten minutes more the line of dawn had widened to a band and warmed to a fiery yellow; and now, as they rounded the last shoulder of rock that fiery band was crossed and recrossed by hundreds and hundreds of black lines, slender lines and thick lines—the masts and funnels of the shipping in the harbour of Johnstown. Soon the lines began to detach themselves from each other, like the tangled meshes of some vast piece of network.

The sun was blazing up now from behind the long low houses. A few passes only were exchanged between its golden javelins and the silver arrows of the moon, and then the king of day was victor of the field. The silver ripples which had so faithfully been accompanying the ship turned to gold, fawnish courtiers who hasten to doff the badge of the departed monarch in order to don that of the ascending one. On the golden ripples there danced a single cocoa-nut shell which had floated outwards from land. Seeing it, Marian

realised that they were close to port, and that it was time to go below to take a final look round her cabin.

When she returned to deck they were steaming slowly into harbour, and the solitary cocoa-nut shell proved itself to have been the vanguard of an army, for a miniature fleet of the shells was now surrounding the ship, bent, to all appearance, either on repelling the invaders or on welcoming the strangers. Which was it? Marian asked herself dreamily, while she stared with dazed and incredulous eyes at the palm-trees by the water's edge.

"I am beginning to believe now that we are in the tropics," she wrote in her letter next day. "As long as there was only the sky and the water and even flying-fish as evidences, my reason declined to be convinced. We took a walk on shore with some of our travelling acquaintances, and on the market-place we bought pine-apples and cocoa-nuts (two for two-pence-halfpenny), bananas and limes. It was very touching to see a young couple on honeymoon eating their first fresh cocoa-nut together with one spoon between them.

"Now we have parted from all our new acquaintances except Mr. Hibbert, who goes as far as St. Clara with us."

Now that they were fairly in the tropics, Captain Berrin-cott began unconsciously to enlarge upon his expectations with regard to Lot 13. With every island that they passed his curiosity grew more acute. The sight of the brilliantly white houses standing in the midst of the brilliantly green cane-fields and detaching themselves from a background of sharply pointed hills left him no peace.

"I am going to look after a sugar plantation," he would explain to whoever happened to enter into conversation with him. "The cane seems to be standing well," he sometimes added tentatively.

If the person addressed was a novice like himself, he would unhesitatingly agree; if an old West Indian hand, the answer would in most cases assume the form of a question.

"This is your first visit to these parts, is it not?"

"Well, h'm, yes. An out-of-the-way place of this sort is always something of a nuisance, you know."

The Captain, as he spoke, gave a slightly upward jerk to his collar, without being in the least aware of it. It was a habit he had acquired since he had become a West Indian proprietor. Whatever misgivings might be lurking in the background of his thoughts, they were, for the moment at least, lying still. It was with his mind full of expectations that belonged distinctly to the sanguine order of these sensations that, on the morning of the 19th, the Captain caught his first glimpse of the stately mountain peaks of St. Clara, with their eternal canopy of cloud hanging sullenly around them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAPTAIN BEGINS TO HAVE DOUBTS.

"COCOA-NUTS, saar ! Buy me cocoa-nuts !"

"Oranges, ma'am ! Bananas ! Finest bananas ever grow on tree !"

"Neber you listen to him, ma'am ! And you rest still, Charlie Soso ; you eber hear of lady buy banana when pine-apples 'longside ?"

"Me dive for sixpence !" shrieked another voice. "Any gentleman want to see Gladstone Glasgow dive ? Him throw sixpence down there, me bring it up in teeth."

"Massa in hurry to go shore ? This way, massa. Quashie's boat only sound boat in Williamstown harbour."

The last words were drowned in a chorus of yelled-out protestations by which the owners of other boats were attempting to give vent to their indignation at this base calumny ; for, though it might be true enough that there was only one sound boat in the harbour, that boat was not Quashie's, but belonged, according to one voice, to somebody called Daniel Aloes, according to another to Samuel Samuel, and so on through a small catalogue of names.

Captain Berrincott, despite all his desire to appear calm, was aware of a touch of flurry, now that the moment of final disembarkment had come, and the clamouring voices around him by no means helped to settle his nerves. He did not want to buy either pine-apples or cocoa-nuts, and he certainly did not want to see any of those black monkeys diving either for sixpence or even for fourpence ; all he wanted was to get on shore without further bother, and, if possible, start for Lot 13 within that same hour. And meanwhile here he was with his hand-bag in his hand, Marian close behind him, people pressing round, black faces gaping upwards, while the air continued to buzz with the prices of oranges and bananas, and Gladstone Glasgow, stripped to the waist, stood on the edge of his boat, all ready for the dive, grinning and nodding in the most insinuating manner known to him, and trying at this moment to catch the Captain's eye.

Turning away in order to elude the gaze of Mr. Glasgow, the Captain caught sight of an elderly gentleman who had just stepped on board, and who, with a bundle of newspapers in his hand, was moving rapidly about on deck, exchanging handshakes and hurried words with several among the passengers, generally also pressing a paper into their hands, but all the time anxiously peering about him, as though in search of something. Mr. Hibbert was among those who received both a handshake and a newspaper, and with whom a few words were exchanged. The next moment the elderly gentleman had darted away from Mr. Hibbert and literally pounced upon the Captain.

"You're Captain Berrincott, I hear! That's right ; I thought you were, from your look," he began, at the same time warmly grasping the Captain's unoccupied hand. "You're going to Lot 13, I know ; but of course you'll stop at least a night in town, everybody does ; and of course you'll come to my house, everybody does too. We haven't got hotels, you know, or perhaps you don't know, just coming from home. What's the latest news there, by the bye ? You are Captain Berrincott, are you not ?"

"Yes, my name is certainly Berrincott."

"And my name is Rudd. This is your daughter, I presume—a most charming young lady; a star that cannot fail to shed a radiance over our isle. By the bye, what did you say that the latest news was?"

"I did not say anything; but when I left home people were talking more of the Russian war-preparations than of anything else."

Mr. Rudd stared for a moment almost open-mouthed.

"Oh, I see, I suppose I didn't quite explain myself. Of course I meant in the sugar-prices. Anything new in that beastly—beg your pardon, I forgot that such language is not suitable for your daughter's maidenly ears. Anything new in beetroot?"

There was nothing new in beetroot, however, and Mr. Rudd returned to his original point, with the result that before three more minutes had elapsed the Captain and Marian were being hurried across the deck and towards the ladder under this gentleman's guidance.

"How do you do, Brown? Canes standing decently? You'll find it on the second page, first column. Here, Hibbert, you're coming too, aren't you? Clear a passage, you chattering rascals!"

Before she had exactly realised what was happening, Marian found herself sitting on a cross-plank with Mr. Hibbert beside her and her father straight opposite, while the boat's head was turned towards the shore. It was a small harbour and all but empty. Some half-dozen small sailing-vessels, one man-of-war at anchor, and a scanty sprinkling of fishing-boats, that was all. All the life that there was seemed to have concentrated itself around the newly arrived steamer, and every stroke of the oars that took them further from its side seemed also to be taking them into a deeper quiet. No bustle on the shore, and neither cargo being shipped nor steam got up.

"Doesn't look like a busy place," was Captain Berrincott's inward observation.

"If they had kept up the duties on foreign sugar," Mr. Rudd was meanwhile saying, "we would have been in quite a

different place from where we are now. There is—ahem!—an article of mine on the subject in this week's 'Williamstown Trumpet' " (the mystery of the distribution of the papers was now cleared up). " Perhaps you would not object to running your eye over it presently and letting me have your opinion."

They were nearing the shore by the time this request was modestly proffered, and Marian, who had been staring about her with greedy eyes, was roused out of her abstraction by Mr. Hibbert's voice, speaking for the first time.

"So it is over now," he remarked abruptly.

"Is it? I think, on the contrary, it is only beginning. The journey is only a preliminary."

"For you, no doubt; but it sometimes happens that a preliminary contains more than the sequel. Do you see that dark blue line over to the right there, against the sky? That is my residence. I am supreme being upon that strip of sand. It's an excellent place for a hermitage."

"But surely you don't live there quite alone?"

"Alone? Oh, dear, no. There are plenty of lizards and more cockroaches than I can count. And besides the lizards and the cockroaches, Cassacou possesses a judge and a doctor, and even a species of half clergyman."

"Why, then you are not a hermit at all."

"Of course not," and Mr. Hibbert's lips twitched in a manner that was unaccountable to Marian. "Here we are, Miss Berrincott. Our ways part here. Good-bye, and thank you very much," he added, speaking a little lower and more quickly.

"For what?" asked Marian in amazement; but the boat had already grated against the shore, and all remarks of a private nature had become impossible.

"You are coming too, of course, Hibbert," said Mr. Rudd; "plenty of room in the buggy."

"Thanks, but the wind is in the right quarter just now; I am going to look out for an opportunity for crossing to Cassacou. Thank you, but I think I had better not come."

Had the other three been a little more interested in Mr.

Hibbert they might have observed that there was a certain emphasis on the last words; as it was it passed unobserved, and with a hurried handshake all round he was gone.

The town looked about as lifeless as the harbour, Marian observed, as they jogged along the wide, empty street, where, to judge from the many broken door-steps and fragmentary shutters, a goodly number of houses were uninhabited. At one spot the grass grew so luxuriantly that a mule standing between the shafts of a cart was enjoying a quite respectable meal. Round some of the door-steps negro children were playing with empty cocoa-nut shells or freshly gathered nutmegs. Here and there a black man lay basking in the blazing sun, and about a dozen men and women of various shades of colour moved aimlessly along the street. And yet, though the place could not help looking lifeless, it also could not help looking gorgeous. How should it be otherwise when over the low roofs stretched the green and glossy chandeliers of the bread-fruit tree, when scarlet and yellow blossoms were blazing on every side, when through every bit of paling, however rotten, huge pink oleander heads were peeping, and when the very weeds which grew between the stones were plants which under another sun would have been treasured in a hot-house?

This day proved to be for the Captain full of bewildering experiences. Mr. Rudd was an old West Indian of a class which has survived on St. Clara somewhat longer than elsewhere. While many of the neighbouring isles had begun to "do" in both arrowroot and cocoa, St. Clara clung with despairing obstinacy to the old cane," which to the eye of a connoisseur would probably have accounted for the look of both town and harbour. Mr. Rudd, though unable to deny the state of affairs, looked for the remedy everywhere except in a change of cultivation. This type of West Indian has been used for so long—ever since he reached the age of reason—to look upon those jointed stems as containing liquid gold, that he cannot without infinite difficulty relinquish the hope of yet turning them to wealth. He has sucked junks of "cane" when he was in the nursery, and now that he is getting near

to the grave he cannot tear his heart from the old idol, even though ruin be staring him in the face.

The Captain had only been a few minutes under Mr. Rudd's roof, and had not yet done sipping his first glass of lime-juice, when an old gentleman with a crumpled red face, from which it was impossible to predict whether he would in the next minute burst out laughing or crying—it seemed unavoidable that he should do one or the other—entered the room. His linen coat was as crumpled as his face, and he seemed evidently much oppressed by the heat. This, it appeared, was Mr. Brooke, who was likewise for the moment enjoying Mr. Rudd's hospitality, but who, as his appearance betrayed, was no seasoned West Indian.

"Most detestable climate that ever was invented," he wrathfully snorted. "Best thing you can do is to turn tail immediately and come home with me by next mail."

"I cannot," said the Captain, "I have got an estate to look after."

"Bah ! So have I ; but you won't catch me again looking after anything that lies within half a hundred degrees of the equator. Why, you don't know what you're let in for ! Greatest conglomeration of horrors you've ever come across. First, there are legions of insects that bother you ; then there is something about an inch long which to tread on means certain death, and something else about two inches long which to come in contact with means brain-fever. Then there are numberless creatures with claws and teeth that flop into your basin, or alight on the crown of your hat, or generally lie round in wait for you ; and finally there's that most interesting rat-tailed snake which, if it gets at you, you must be a person much given to delay if you are not dead in an hour."

"Two hours," corrected Mr. Rudd soothingly.

"And it isn't the beasts alone, it's everything else as well. You're given strange and unknown food to eat. Scarcely have you got settled in your rocking-chair (which, by the way, is the only enduring institution of these parts) when you're made to get out of it in order to look at effects of sunlight

through tree-branches or upon water. And all the time you're living in an atmosphere of sunstroke and low fever. No, no ; talk of the glories of the tropics to any one you like, but not to Jack Brooke."

"Here comes Weedon," said Mr. Rudd, who had listened with perfect good-humour to his guest's outburst. "Come and have a drink, Weedon."

Mr. Weedon was a yellow and mournful-looking individual, who when he was told who the Captain was and whither he was bound pressed his hand with a distinct air of condolence.

"Going to look after Lot 13? Is that really so? Please be assured of my deepest sympathy."

"But surely there is nothing wrong with Lot 13?" asked the Captain a little anxiously.

"Well, superstitious folk say that its name is all wrong, to begin with."

"Because of the unlucky number? That's all nonsense. I mean, is there any particular screw loose about the canes, or the soil, or——"

"Not more loose than is the case with every other estate on our unhappy island," replied the yellow-faced man.

"Nonsense, Weedon!" broke in Mr. Rudd. "Do not let yourself be disheartened." And he turned to the Captain. "There are plenty of ways of remedying the evil, as I have pointed out in this very article to which I have ventured to call your attention. Now, if you would kindly lend me your ear for a moment——"

But here Mr. Weedon, who seemed to know what was coming, somewhat hastily interposed, and the conversation now became a species of duel between the two. Both were absolutely immovable in their views. When Mr. Weedon said, "Our palmy days are over," Mr. Rudd replied, "But they will come again;" or else, "We are going down hill as fast as we can," was answered by, "But we shall go up again on the other side." To which Mr. Weedon, with a broken-hearted laugh, responded: "Which other side? We are not a switch-back railway, so far as I know."

The poor Captain listened in increasing perplexity. Which, oh, which of these two was he to believe !

Presently it appeared that Mr. Weedon's own plantation was situated on the windward side of the island, about half-way to Lot 13, and it was arranged that that gentleman's buggy should convey the Captain and his daughter to their destination.

It was past four in the afternoon when Captain Berrincott at length found himself embarked on the last stage of his journey. The sun still blazed, but the horse and the mule which formed the team of the buggy trotted in perfect harmony and at a fine pace along the uneven road. On one side the sea, on the other steep mountains in the background, and in the foreground partly cane-fields, partly deserted tracts over which the quick-growing guava-bushes were creeping. The further they got from the town the more frequent did these abandoned tracts become, and the Captain, despite his determination to show surprise at nothing, felt himself compelled to put a question.

"Thrown out of cultivation," replied Mr. Weedon. "The proprietors found that it came cheaper than keeping up the works."

"There is a windmill," said Marian. "And it is turning, too !"

"For its own pleasure," completed Mr. Weedon, with a dreary smile. "There is nothing inside. Poor Mr. Thomson also was ruined by sugar."

"But if sugar is such a bad business," remarked the Captain, a trifle impatiently, "why do you not give it up and grow arrowroot ?"

For a minute Mr. Weedon looked slightly foolish.

"Because it is too late," he then replied in accents that were almost sepulchral.

The truth of the matter was that the pessimistic Mr. Weedon was just as much under the charm of sugar as was the sanguine Mr. Rudd, and that he could just as little make up his mind to abandon the tall and waving "cane" for the low and insignificant arrowroot plant. Besides, it was difficult to

imagine Mr. Weedon doing anything else but singing the dirge of the island ; should St. Clara ever regain its prosperity, then most assuredly his occupation would be gone. Who can say whether he did not dimly feel this ?

"By the way," said Mr. Weedon, perhaps in order to change the subject, "you know the history of Lot 13, do you not ?"

"I know that it is a particle of a large estate that was divided into lots. Is there anything more to know ?"

Mr. Weedon smiled mournfully.

"Only a few details. The man who bought Lot 13 at the auction was of an imaginative turn of mind—so goes the story—and a speculative friend first talked him into the idea that 13 was an unlucky number and then bought the estate cheap. However, it so happened that the buyer really had a run of bad luck, and being possibly made shaky by remorse he passed the estate on to some one else in a great hurry. After that it changed hands more than once before it got into the Berrincott family, and as one of the possessors broke his nose over a cliff, and another ended with delirium tremens, and as all were more or less ruined by the place, of course the tradition of bad luck stuck to the estate; nothing as tragical as a curse, you know—just ordinary and prosaic bad luck."

"Neither Simon nor his father were ruined by Lot 13," said the Captain, turning almost a little pale.

"Because they had something else to fall back upon. As far as that, they don't seem to have been particularly lucky in other ways, either."

The Captain said nothing. He had just remembered that Simon's father had been an invalid all his life, and that Simon himself had been unlucky in love. Of course he was not superstitious, but he would have preferred that these coincidences had not been.

They had been driving for more than an hour to windward when the buggy drew up in order to let Mr. Weedon alight. He was close to his house, as he explained, and the black coachman received orders to drive on to Lot 13. The Captain would almost have preferred it if Mr. Weedon had found it

possible to remain in the buggy; for some unaccountable reason he was beginning to feel nervous. Neither were Mr. Weedon's farewell words calculated to reassure him.

"I shall ride over in a day or two and see how you are," he said, with a sympathetic hand-pressure. "It will be a trying time, and I don't think it would be fair to leave you to yourself.

As the buggy jogged on again the Captain became plunged in thought. Something about Mr. Weedon's talk had given him an unpleasant turn, and stirred up a train of thought which had for long lain dormant. Could it be? No; he didn't think it could be. And yet, supposing that, after all, it was?

Neither the Captain nor Marian spoke much during the latter part of the drive. It was not Marian's way to exclaim, and besides there really was not much to exclaim at, for here, on the windward side of the island, high or very luxuriant growths were the exception.

At six it began to grow dark rather suddenly, and not long after, the black coachman drew up with a jerk at the bottom of a shallow, open valley, on the sides of which, were perched some strange square objects with legs, which seen through the failing light, might have been taken for some sort of monstrous goblins, but which in reality were tiny huts.

"Dis be Lot 13, saar," said the driver over his shoulder, with his most amiable grin.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIG HOUSE AND THE LITTLE HOUSE.

"Lot 13, *Feb. 21st.*

"DEAR AUNT VAL. : I suppose I had better get over the worst at once. Well, then, Lot 13 is a failure. But I must tell you about it from the beginning. We got here on the evening of the 19th. Mr. Silkworth had not expected us so

soon, and was not immediately forthcoming. When the buggy had turned back again, we stood on the road with our boxes beside us, and a whole circle of niggers stood round us and stared, the big ones chattering and the little ones sucking bits of sugar-cane. At last Mr. Silkworth came in a great hurry. He is a big man, with curly black hair and very thick lips. He explained to father that he was quite sure he would spend some days in town, and so had made no preparations. He had not even moved over from the Big House into the Little House; he had meant only to do that when we sent for the buggy, but he was afraid it would be too late for to-night. It ended by our spending the night in the Little House. There are two houses here, you must understand. The Big House is the one that Uncle Simon used to live in when he came out here; the Little House was at that time the manager's house. Now, of course, the manager has made himself comfortable in the Big House, and the Little one stands empty, as a rule. It looked most desperately empty when Mr. Silkworth ushered us into it that first night by the light of an oil-lamp which he had lit in a hurry, and of course there were neither sheets nor pillows on the beds, and only two chairs and one table in the three tiny rooms.

"It was only next morning that we saw the place properly. This tiny cottage stands on a hill, and I can see the sea from my window, but on the whole the view is disappointing. The cane-fields are of course slightly monotonous, and as for the village, imagine a shallow valley on the sides of which about a dozen little wooden cages on stilts are roasting in the sun. Against the sky-line stand two cocoanut-trees—there used to be hundreds, Mr. Silkworth says, before the blight. Then there is a Portuguese shop, a smoking chimney, and a large yard, and that is about all.

"But I must return to the events of yesterday. If only my paper would lie still! We live in a thorough draught here, you know, and at this moment I am writing with my hair-brush on one corner of my paper and my glove-stretcher on the other, and with a banana to keep the envelope from flying away. Well, to resume. Of course the first thing father

wanted to see was the sugar-works, and of course I went with him. I think father had expected something quite different, or at any rate a little more than what there actually is, viz., some wooden sheds, a wooden wheel turned by water, and two stone rollers. Of course the whole place was swarming with negroes, and everywhere and even in the yard there was such a thick, warm sweetish smell hanging in the air that I was quite glad to get away. Father spent most of the day with Mr. Silkworth, but I went straight back to the cottage, having had enough with the boiling-house.

"It was getting quite late in the afternoon when at last father came back. I was sitting in what they here call the "gallery," which is simply a covered passage running along the front of the house, when he appeared quite unexpectedly—for there is no real path outside, and I had not heard his steps on the grass—and without saying a word dropped into the second rocking-chair, and began to laugh so loud and so strangely that my first impression was that he was out of his mind. When I begged him to tell me what was the matter, he could only gasp out, 'Simon—it's Simon that's the matter! I see it all now! Oh, what a joke!' And he set off laughing again until I really got frightened.

"When he was a little quieted down he went on talking half to me and half to himself. I made out from what he said that, after having looked at the whole place and had a talk with Mr. Silkworth, he had come to the conclusion that Uncle Simon had left him Lot 13 simply out of spite, as he knew very well that there was no profit to be had out of the place, only worries and disappointment, and that his idea had evidently been to pass on to father the bad luck which sticks to the place. I don't know, of course, whether this is true, and it would be very terrible to think of any one being so wicked, but father believes it firmly. He says it is 'just like Simon,' and he can't help enjoying the joke, in spite of everything. Well, when he had done laughing he got out of his chair and walked up and down the gallery with his hands clenched, and declaring loudly that the last word in this matter was not spoken yet. There was also something about

making Uncle Simon turn in his grave, which I did not quite understand. Presently father began to abuse Mr. Silkworth too, though I don't know exactly what harm he has done in the matter. I am not quite sure whether father does not mean to dismiss him. At least, he talked of him as 'that fellow Silkworth,' and said a good deal also about rusty old systems that had long been exploded. Perhaps I shall be able to tell you more of this before I despatch my letter; but I must wind up for to-day."

Marian's surmises as to her father's intentions with regard to Mr. Silkworth proved to be perfectly correct. The fact was that the Captain required some object on which to let out a little of the rage which was devouring him, and a natural combination of circumstances pointed to Mr. Silkworth as this object. If Lot 13 was not the wretched place it was, Simon would never have been in the position to play this detestable trick; and Lot 13 being a wretched place meant that Mr. Silkworth was a bad manager, which again meant that Mr. Silkworth must go. The conclusion was quite simple, and as the Captain was no lover of delay, Mr. Silkworth heard his sentence before another twenty-four hours had passed. The announcement was followed by an altercation, brief but lively, in the course of which Mr. Silkworth let fall some remarks which at the moment appeared both pointless and trifling, but which, seen by the light of later events, gained a significance of their own.

He did not seem able to grasp the possibility of the thing announced to him.

"Leave the place? Give up the management?" was all that he was able at first to repeat, while his obstinately curly hair tried to stand on end, but did not quite succeed. "Surely I have not understood you aright? That cannot be your meaning."

The Captain repeated that it was his meaning, nevertheless.

"Give up the management? But do you know what you are doing? Are you aware that I have managed the place for eleven years, that my brother managed it before me and my

father before him ? Why, the Silkworths have been at Lot 13 longer than the Berrincotts, seeing that my grandfather served the former possessor."

"Let us have no reminiscences, please," said the Captain with rising choler, "and for heaven's sake don't begin talking about your devotion to the family. Can't say either that I've seen any particular trace of it yet. If you had had any notion of your duties I shouldn't have had to stumble into a dark room without a chair in it when I reached this place the other night." This was a side-hit which the Captain could not resist giving. "Does such negligence show regard or respect for the family ? All I can say is that if Simon was as badly served by your brother as I have been by you it is high time there were no more Silkworths at Lot 13."

While the Captain talked Mr. Silkworth had been desperately racking his brains as to what could possibly have caused his dismissal. Now he looked up.

"Is it because I had not got the Big House ready that I am being dismissed ?"

"Nonsense, it's not on account of that."

"On account of what, then ? That's the only thing I can think of."

"On account of your having mismanaged the estate."

Mr. Silkworth shrugged his shoulders, and without any word of leave-taking turned slowly towards the door. There was a dazed look on his face. He had almost reached the end of the wooden gallery when he turned again abruptly and came back to where the Captain was standing.

"You said something just now about Mr. Simon and about respect not being showed to the family ; I wasn't listening properly at the moment : surely you aren't meaning about Mrs. Simon ? That wasn't my doing."

"What do you mean ?"

"It wasn't my fault that Mrs. Simon was made to die in the Little House instead of in the Big House ; that was my brother's doing, and no doubt it would have been more respectful to the family if she had died in the Big House, but the day was fixed, you see, and my brother in a hurry, and, at

any rate, I had no hand in the matter, so it would not be fair to visit it upon me ; why, I was a mere lad at the time, though I remember Mrs. Simon well enough."

"Mrs. Simon ? What is the man talking of ? Surely Mrs. Simon died at Thornton ?" But even as he said it the Captain remembered that there had been a first Mrs. Simon.

"Oh, bother those old stories ! I don't in the least care whether Mrs. Simon died in the Big or the Little House. And now go ! there is nothing more to say."

But Mr. Silkworth did not immediately go, and it appeared that there was, on the contrary, a good deal more to say. In ordinary life the manager was a well enough mannered person, who kept his strong language almost exclusively for the abuse of black men. It was rather curious, however, to note how in moments when his self-control broke down, his eyes had a way of rolling and his teeth a way of gleaming which strongly recalled a nigger in a rage. In Mr. Silkworth's eyes the Captain had always had something of the taint of an interloper about him—seeing that the estate had come to him quite out of the regular way—and he was told so now in no measured terms. According to Mr. Silkworth it was even an open question as to whether the right of giving a manager his dismissal belonged to him at all, and not rather to the head of the family, therefore at this moment to "Mr. Simon's" son.

"Go and appeal to him," jeered the Captain, "if you think he's the person in authority ; perhaps he will redress your grievances."

"So I shall !" shouted back Mr. Silkworth. "I've never been off the island in my life but I *am* going to appeal to Mr. Simon's son, even though I have to cross the Atlantic for it. You'll yet repent having treated me so unworthily. The idea of dismissing a Silkworth from Lot 13 ! I tell you again,—you don't know what you are doing." With that he was gone.

His last words were indeed true, and true to a degree of which he himself was unaware. For there can be no doubt

that the Captain did not know what he was doing when he made up his mind to the seemingly not over-weighty step of dismissing Mr. Silkworth.

CHAPTER XI.

POTATO-SOUP.

HAD the mail not been going so soon it is just possible that Mr. Silkworth's threat might have turned out to be an empty one. Twelve or even ten days of enforced reflection have been known to alter all sorts of people's views upon all sorts of things. But in two days his anger had not had time to cool, and the consequence was that he went off, still loudly declaring that he was going to demand justice at head-quarters, and still followed, so to say, by the Captain's jeers. Even after they were well out of the tropics he continued to rack his brains as to the possible causes of his dismissal. He could not get rid of a notion that the Little House was somehow entangled in the matter. Perhaps it had been just a trifle too easy-going to put off the move to the very last day; but then Mr. Silkworth was accustomed to take things easily. There was in his veins a touch of that happy *insouciance* which is to be met with so largely in that blessed clime, and which may possibly have been handed down to him from some more than dark-complexioned ancestor, the same, no doubt, to whom he owed that provokingly obstinate curl of his black locks. In this imperfect world every one has a cross to bear, and the objection which his hair had to lie flat was the cross which had fallen to Mr. Silkworth's lot. Damp cloths, laid on overnight, were a help, no doubt. This, combined with a generous use of hair-oil, had been known to effect such a transformation in Mr. Silkworth's appearance that not only had his best friends cut him dead, but that not even his worst enemies would have dared to insinuate that there was anything but the whitest blood in his veins. But nobody can live in an atmosphere of

damp cloths; besides which these articles are apt not to be handy exactly when they are most wanted. Whenever Mr. Silkworth's thoughts returned to the moment of the Captain's appearance at Lot 13 he ground his teeth and clenched his hands, not so much because of the general scramble that had ensued, as because of his having been surprised without time for making even the most hasty arrangement with regard to his hair.

During the whole of the voyage the Little House remained in the foreground of Mr. Silkworth's thoughts.

Yes, perhaps he had been just a shade too easy-going in that matter. It was possible, though it was not likely, that the Captain had got an inkling of that affair of Mrs. Simon and had somehow mixed him up with Joseph.

The history of the matter was as follows:—Joseph had been engaged to be married for more than two months, and Lizzie, the bride elect, was particularly anxious to be married on her birthday, which fell on the 20th of June. On one point Joseph and Lizzie were agreed: namely, that they must positively marry "into the Big House," which, now that "Mr. Simon" had given up coming out, was not in the least wanted. Of course there was Mrs. Simon still living in it, or rather slowly dying in it, but that could only be a question of days. Mr. Silkworth vaguely remembered that Joseph had applied to Mr. Simon—it had always been Mr. Simon who had managed the Lot 13 affairs—and that he had been told he might have the Big House whenever Mrs. Simon was dead. But meanwhile the 20th of June was approaching, and Mrs. Simon had not yet done dying, and Lizzie was in tears at the idea of not being married on her birthday, so was it not the most sensible thing that Joseph could do, more particularly considering that the Atlantic lay between Mr. Simon and Lot 13, to have Mrs. Simon carefully moved over into the Little House, where, when all is said and done, she could die quite as comfortably as in the big one? Mr. Silkworth remembered the day quite well. He had been a lad of eighteen at the time, supposed to be studying sugar under his brother's charge,

and he had even helped to carry the hammock in which Mrs. Simon had been placed.

Lizzie had been made happy by being married on her birthday, and Mrs. Simon had trailed on for another ten days or so before finally drawing her last breath. Whether Joseph had ever been hauled over the coals by Mr. Simon concerning this affair Mr. Silkworth did not know, for he had not been taken into his elder brother's confidence; but he did have a recollection of Joseph having been somewhat taciturn for a time, which, however, might have had some other cause. It was very unlikely that Mr. Simon should have taken to heart anything concerning Mrs. Simon, seeing in what a hurry he had been to give her a successor.

Scraps of these reminiscences revived in Mr. Silkworth's mind during the course of the long sea-voyage, but once in sight of English shore he thought of nothing but of how he was to obtain justice from Mr. Simon's son.

It was after he was in London that he made an unpleasant discovery. His first step on reaching town had been to buy an overcoat, for the March air was sharper than that to which he was accustomed; but when it came to the moment of pulling out his purse, Mr. Silkworth became aware that the price of the yellow overcoat on which his choice had fallen would not leave him furnished with sufficient coin of the realm to pay for his ticket to Thornton. That was a bore. He had not thought of this before, and was now obliged regretfully to shift his choice to a cheaper garment of sandy-grey. Even as it was, though the railway ticket was secure, there was no margin left for such things as a felt hat, for instance. It was with a wide-brimmed straw hat on his head that Mr. Silkworth stepped into the train going North. Yes, undoubtedly it was a nuisance; but everything, of course, would be altered for the better when once he had reached Thornton.

On the following forenoon Bernard was sitting in what he called his "study," occupied with the plans for his model cottages. That is to say "occupied" is perhaps scarcely the right word to use, seeing that the pencil fell out of his hand on an average of about every five minutes, and that at intervals of

scarcely half that length of time, his eyes would stray to the window, through which a single feeble ray of very pale golden sunshine had succeeded in effecting an entrance.

At last he threw down the pencil and got up. He had come to the conclusion that the model cottages could wait. It would be so much pleasanter to busy himself with them when he had not to do it alone, when there was some one else there with whom he could discuss his ideas, who would lean over his shoulder and give him good advice and busy herself along with him. Then a doubt crossed his mind : *would* she busy herself with this or with anything else ? Would she take an interest in his ideas ?

The next instant already the doubt was chased away by a vision of her face. So vivid was that vision that Bernard drew a deep breath and turned instinctively towards the door. The atmosphere of the study had suddenly become insupportable. That feeble ray of sunshine was by no means as harmless as it looked ; but had, on the contrary, proved itself to be a dangerously pointed shaft of pure though pale gold, which, hitting its mark, had put an end to Bernard's repose of mind.

He actually surprised himself wishing that the anniversary of his father's death-day had already arrived. Of course there was no earthly reason why he should wait for that day ; but Bernard had taken it into his head that it would not be seemly for him to make Sybil Durrant an offer of marriage before the year of mourning had elapsed. It wanted still about a month to that time, but that was no reason for not walking over to The Monastery. If he made haste he might by good luck have a quiet talk with Sybil before the luncheon gong sounded.

It was just at the moment when, having come to this conclusion, Bernard was moving definitely towards the door, that steps were heard outside, the handle was turned, and a most incongruous-looking individual in a sandy-grey overcoat and with a battered straw hat on his head, was ushered in.

Poor Mr. Silkworth could not possibly have chosen a worse moment. At a more favourable time Bernard, though he

could never have fulfilled the expectations which the unfortunate manager had placed upon him, might yet very likely have taken some interest in his tale and sent him away with a liberal sum in his pocket, as a retribution for supposed damages. But just now time was a great deal too short for either taking or showing interest. The Durrants lunched at two, and it was close upon half-past twelve now. Every minute more spent here was spent at the expense of that quiet talk of which he felt so greatly in need.

The unavoidable result was that ten minutes after he had been ushered into the study, Mr. Silkworth found himself standing once more in the passage staring about him open-mouthed, and wondering whether he stood on his head or on his heels. As yet he was too much astonished to feel angry.

He was still standing thus, when unconsciously he raised his head a little, half closed his eyes and widened his nostrils, after the manner of an animal that is sniffing the air.

Somebody had left an important door open, and the consequence was that the front part of the house could not possibly remain in ignorance as to this being the dinner-hour for the back part of the house. Mr. Silkworth was almost certain that he smelt potato-soup. At the very moment that he told himself this he remembered that he had eaten nothing since last night. The smell of that potato-soup made him feel almost sick with longing. Amazement and indignation were for the moment completely drowned in the prompt and savagely fixed resolve, somehow or other, to get at that soup. He turned and followed the scent.

Along scraps of passages, up steps and down steps, it led him in the rambling old house, until at length he stood in the doorway of what evidently was the servants' hall.

A portly, middle-aged dame decently attired in black, a grey-haired butler, a couple of footmen, a couple of housemaids in white caps, and a couple of nondescript females were at their dinner. When Mr. Silkworth appeared in the doorway the lively conversation which had been going on was cut short and several spoons remained poised in the air.

John was the only one to whom the stranger was not an utter stranger, for he had ushered this person into the study only a quarter of an hour ago. He rose instinctively from his seat.

"Shall I show you the way out, sir?"

Mr. Silkworth measured John with his eye.

"You are not to show me the way out, but you are to give me some of that potato-soup. No, I am not mad—I am only starving!"

He said it in a tone which somehow put resistance out of the question, and before John, whose training was very much superior to his presence of mind, had found a reply, both his plate and his spoon had been taken possession of by the stranger.

While the man in the grey overcoat and the battered straw hat ate the soup, the servants stared in silent amazement, not even looking at each other, for fear of missing one of this enigmatical creature's movements. When he looked up at last from the empty plate, it was to find about eight pairs of eyes fixed upon him.

"So that's it, is it—you're just expiring to know who I am and how I come to be here? You want to classify me, don't you? Well, then, I feel somewhat better now, so open your ears and listen."

"And do you mean to say that it's a fact that there was a first Mrs. Simon?" inquired the under-housemaid Susan with a flippant laugh, when Mr. Silkworth had done pouring out his grievances. "I always took it to be a——"

Susan had meant to finish up with "fable," but shrank back abashed before an indignant glance of Mrs. Spankins, the housekeeper. The idea of daring to doubt the existence of any member of the family was decidedly too much for Mrs. Spankins's equanimity.

Meanwhile Mr. Silkworth was elaborating his explanations, while helping himself steadily to everything within reach, although now at a rather more reasonable pace.

"A first Mrs. Simon? Dear me! I thought everybody knew that there had been a first Mrs. Simon."

"She was a good-looking young woman, was she not?"

inquired Mrs. Spankins, who, in point of fact, was expiring with curiosity on the subject.

"She would have been good-looking if she had not always, latterly at least, had red eyelids and wet eyelashes."

Mrs. Spankins moved uneasily on her seat. It was quite evident that the ground was delicate to tread; and yet such an opportunity for obtaining reliable information as to the first Mrs. Simon could not be lightly parted with.

"Do you mean that he got tired of her as soon as all that?" asked Susan. "I thought they had only been married for a year."

"Nearer three years, I fancy," corrected Mr. Silkworth.

"Oh, come!" put in the grey-haired butler, "there's no particular object in making a mess of our dates. Everybody knows that Mr. Simon had been going about in London as a widower for more than a year before he married Miss Ingram."

"I don't see how he can have done that," said Mr. Silkworth reflectively, "seeing that he was not a widower for more than a couple of months, at the outside: in fact, I am pretty sure that it wasn't months, but only weeks."

"There's some mistake here," said Mrs. Spankins, severely. "There was no question whatever of any such indecorous haste. It is well known that Mr. Simon did not bring home Miss Ingram until the June of '59."

"*Not until* the June of '59! He couldn't have been much quicker than that, could he? Don't you know that it was the June of '59 that finished off the first Mrs. Simon?"

"There's some mistake here," repeated Mrs. Spankins, staggering to her feet with a gesture which seemed to imply that the discussion was closed. A short but sharp struggle between loyalty to the family and the baser feeling of curiosity had ended in the victory of the former.

Mr. Silkworth, having by this time dined pretty copiously, inquired his way to the Thornton village.

"Right through the park," he was told, "over the bridge and past the cemetery—that is your straightest way. But dear me, Mr. Silkworth, whatever are you going to do next?"

Surely not to sail straight back again to where you came from ?" —

"No, I am not going to sail straight back again, and for the excellent reason that my purse does not contain enough to pay for my ticket. Upon my word, I do believe that the only rational thing for me to do is to set about discovering a mine of diamonds, or, at the very least, of gold."

Susan and Bessie went into peals of laughter, finding that Mr. Silkworth was quite too irresistibly funny; and five minutes later the West Indian manager with his hands in his pockets and his straw hat still on his head was strolling over the grass in the direction that had been indicated to him.

Though his quest had been a failure, his frame of mind was anything but despairing. For one thing, Mr. Silkworth did not belong to the class of people who are able to realise what despair means after an ample meal. As he moved over the grass now his thoughts were busy, not with the future but with the past. Could it really be a fact that Mr. Simon had passed himself off for a widower while the first Mrs. Simon was still lingering on? There could be no doubt, certainly, that he had kept away from St. Clara during the last two years of her life. Could all this signify anything more than met the eye? Mr. Silkworth put the question to himself leisurely, almost indolently, as he lounged toward the village.

The direction he was following happened to be much the same as that followed by Marian on the June morning which had followed her arrival at Thornton. The consequence was that, like Marian, Mr. Silkworth presently found himself leaning over the side of a bridge, on turning from which, like Marian, he caught sight of some ruined walls overgrown with ivy.

Having drawn a little closer he recognised that this was the cemetery he had been directed to leave to the left; and at the same time he became aware that two men were busy inside, strewing gravel on the paths, while the iron gate stood ajar.

The desire to finish opening a door that is half open is almost instinctive in human nature, and Mr. Silkworth was in no hurry. The consequence was that the two workmen looked up in some astonishment as the gravel crunched under a heavy tread.

"Berrincott," "Berrincott," on all sides nothing but Berrincotts, sleeping under flat, rounded and pointed stones.

Instinctively he began to look out for the name "Simon," being the one solitary member of the family whom he had personally known. Neither was it hard to find, being engraved upon the very newest and whitest of the tombstones.

"Simon Berrincott,
Born April 3rd, 1830."

But that was not all, for the stone bore a small dictionary of dates.

"Married June 29th, 1859,
to Sophia Elizabeth Ingram,
Died April 10th, 1884."

"So the first Mrs. Simon didn't count," reflected Mr. Silkworth, gazing thoughtfully at the stone. "Poor wretch! It certainly was the wisest thing she could do to retire from the scene at the rate she did. No, it's as clear as mud that nothing connected with *that* young woman could have brought Joseph into disgrace.

And, settling his straw hat more satisfactorily on his head, Mr. Silkworth sauntered out of the cemetery as leisurely as he had sauntered into it, still followed by the eyes of the two workmen.

Having reached the "Golden Cock" in the village, Mr. Silkworth, whose night had been spent in the railway, proceeded to throw himself, great-coat and all, upon the extremely primitive bed which was put at his disposal.

By the time he opened his eyes again the room was dark, except for the stray rays of an oil-lamp which flickered in the village-street. This alone would have been enough to tell him that he had slept for several hours, but there was another symptom which proclaimed the same fact in quite as unmis-

takable a way. At first it touched him only as a vague and distant suspicion. It was not until he had sat up and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes that he became aware of being furiously hungry.

"Supper!" The thought burst upon him as a vision of gladness while he bounded to his feet. At the same moment, however, some stray shred of prudence guided his hand towards his purse, and immediately there came a change over his features. Settling himself down once more upon the bed, with loosely dangling legs, he stared aghast by the light of the street-lamp at the all but empty compartments.

To be sure, he had known this before in a sort of way. He was not poorer than he had been when he left Thornton House; but the world, looked at with hungry eyes, was an entirely different place for Thomas Silkworth than it had been with the glamour of dinner still lying on it. Not until this moment did a sense of genuine alarm take hold of him at the idea that his quest was perhaps going to turn out a vain one.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Silkworth, as he stuffed his purse back into his pocket, "I believe I was right when I told them that the only rational thing for me to do would be to find a gold-mine! But, unluckily, I haven't a notion how to set about it."

On one point he was quite clear: he was not going to acknowledge himself beaten yet. Though Mr. Berrincott had virtually turned him out of the house, nothing could be easier than to ascertain in which direction he was accustomed to walk, and then to lie in wait for him in the park. The neighbourhood of the cemetery would not be an unlikely spot, for instance; and with the recollection of the cemetery there straightway stirred again in his mind that dictionary of dates which a little while ago he had seen engraved upon the white tombstone:—

"Born April 3rd, 1830.

Married June 29th, 1859."

But this time he put up his head abruptly, as though struck with a totally new idea.

"June 29th? Surely there's some mistake here. I'm almost ready to swear that Mrs. Simon wasn't dead by June 29th."

The date had conveyed no tangible impression to his pleasantly dozing mind when first he had set eyes on it; it was only now that his painfully wide-awake senses had caught the gleam of a possibility.

Scarcely a possibility yet it would seem, nothing more than a wild suggestion, which at any other moment would probably not have been thought worth investigating. But this was not a time for leaving any stone, however unlikely, unturned.

Having sat for several minutes gnawing his under-lip and passing his ten fingers through his curls, Mr. Silkworth looked up again. "The last day of June, surely I am not dreaming when I remember that Mrs. Simon held out till the last day of June? And on that stone they have got June 29th carved quite plainly. And what was that about Mr. Simon calling himself a widower when he was nothing of the sort? Ye powers above!" and Mr. Silkworth rose suddenly to his feet. "I don't quite know where I've been letting my wits wander all along. Upon my word there's no saying whether that gold-mine is not going to open before my feet after all!"

CHAPTER XII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

"HENRY," remarked Mrs. Durrant, on the evening after Bernard's latest visit to the Monastery, "that young man is taking too long about it; it is time he were brought to the point."

"Eliza," answered Henry, looking up from his paper with a panic-stricken countenance, "I cannot do it."

"Let's be explicit, please; you cannot do what?"

"I cannot ask him his intentions."

Mrs. Durrant shrugged her shoulders and rubbed the sleep a little further out of her eyes.

"I wonder," she remarked, in an accent of pitying contempt, "how long it would take to teach even an intelligent man the merest rudiments of social tactics ! Here it's very nearly a quarter of a century since I've taken you in hand, and yet you are still capable of talking of such commonplace things and so totally antagonistic to all ideas of diplomacy as inquiring after a man's intentions ! Really, Henry, I sometimes despair of you."

Mr. Durrant, thus severely apostrophised, hung his head a little, and held his tongue. To any third person who at that moment had been in a position to throw a scrutinising glance into the room, this individual with the hang-dog look about both his expression and attitude, would hardly have been recognisable as the stately Mr. Durrant, whose figure made quite a show at public meetings.

It is possible that that same scrutinising glance would have equally failed to recognise in the person now leading the conversation, the large sleepy woman, who in general went by the name of Mrs. Durrant.

An unwieldy mass of flesh, a deep bass voice very rarely heard, a uniform indifference to her surroundings, and an apparently unconquerable inclination to sleep,—this was absolutely all that the outer world knew of Mrs. Durrant. But never was the outer world more mistaken. That uniform indifference was no indifference at all, but only a cloak which screened the mass of passive energy of which her entire person consisted. Physically unwieldy and apparently never doing anything more active than sitting with her hands in her lap, this woman really had been the soul and spirit of everything, the soap manufactory included, ever since she had stood before the altar with her Henry. The apparent laziness and indifference of her demeanour never failed to throw dust in inexperienced eyes, and only served the more securely to screen that sleepless ambition which had made them what they were.

Mr. Durrant had long since wisely bowed under the iron

will of his wife, but so well did he play his part that no outsider ever came near to guessing that this calm, well-behaved and self possessed gentleman was a puppet whose strings were pulled by that big, lazy woman.

The children had naturally no choice but to follow in their father's footsteps. Of the three elder daughters each had had some share of good looks, and had consequently been made use of by their mother as stepping-stones to her present position. Harriet's eyelashes had been found useful in entrapping a baronet, while Amelia's smiles had done for an earl's younger son, and Caroline's profile had put an end to the bachelor days of a landowner of ancient pedigree. Sybil was the only one remaining to her ; what more natural than that Mrs. Durrant, having been so completely successful in her three first experiments, should confidently turn her thoughts towards a fourth ?

It is true that Bernard had no title, but his position was all that could be desired, and the name of Berrincott had an excellent sound in the county.

There was another circumstance, too, which to some extent weighed in the balance, namely that Sybil's affections were, to all appearance, engaged. It is true that this was a mere detail and one which Mrs. Durrant did not generally include in her calculations ; but that was no reason why, so long as it chose to accommodate itself to more weighty matters, it should not be taken into consideration.

"Really, Henry, I despair of you !"

"What do you propose doing ?" inquired Henry, gazing at his Eliza in awe-struck admiration.

"I propose finding out his intentions without asking them."

"I have a notion that he does not intend to propose until his year of mourning is up."

"I know he does not, but that is no objection to his doing so."

Henry stared inquiringly, waiting for more.

"It is perfectly simple. That young man has got to the stage at which a *tête-à-tête* is synonymous with a proposal. It

only requires the surroundings to be properly managed, and in this case nothing could be easier. That county ball on the 12th comes in as handy as possible."

"But, my dearest Eliza, young Berrincott does not go to balls yet."

"That is exactly it."

"I am afraid I don't quite——"

"Of course you don't; I know you're only a man. Now attend. Sybil, of course, is going to this ball; and what more natural than that the circumstance should be casually touched upon in the young man's presence?"

"But do you think he will like that?" asked Mr. Durrant, uneasily.

"I am as certain as I am of eternal salvation that he will not; more particularly if it is mentioned that Captain Stenning is going to be present. He didn't half enjoy the Captain taking her in to dinner the other night."

"And you are going to mention him?"

"No, *you* are. It comes more naturally from you. And then the young man can make up his mind as to whether Sybil is to go on the 12th or not."

"Do you mean that you are going to leave the decision to him?"

"That depends. A mere acquaintance would of course never venture to demand such a sacrifice. Ahem!—not beginning to see daylight yet, my love?"

"Eliza," stammered Mr. Durrant, after a long pause of speechless admiration, "you are—you are a—a genius!"

"As long as there are only men to manage, I fancy I'm pretty sure of my footing," responded Mrs. Durrant, modestly. "And now, be so good as to send me Sybil. There are a few directions required to prepare the ground."

Sybil arrived presently, attired in a black evening dress, for it was subsequent to the sounding of the dressing-gong that the conversation between husband and wife had taken place.

"You want to speak to me, mamma?"

"Yes, my child. Is the door properly closed? Come a

little nearer. Did Mr. Berrincott say anything about walking over again this week ? ”

“He—he did say something about bringing over some of those fuchsia cuttings,” stammered Sybil, growing rather pink.

“Have you any reason for supposing that he will bring them over to-morrow ? ”

“To-morrow or next day,” was whispered back.

“Good ; that fits in. It was your blue serge you had on when he first saw you last year, was it not ? ”

Sybil looked up in some surprise.

“Yes, mamma, I fancy it was.”

“Tell Podskin to look it out, and until I give you further orders, mind that no other frock finds its way on to your back.”

“But, mamma, I’m afraid it’s rather faded, and the edge is a little frayed. My brown velveteen is much more——”

“Really, Sybil, you are almost as bad as your father. As a dressmaker’s advertisement, no doubt your brown velveteen would be infinitely superior ; but has it ever occurred to you what associations that brand-new garment can carry with it, compared to those which must of necessity be lingering about the very creases of the serge ? It wants but a feather to turn the scale, as you have already admitted to me. Very well, an association may be that feather. It is for this reason that you are to live in the old blue serge for the next few days ; it is for this reason, too, that you are to lay in a supply of hepaticas and snowdrops, which you will mind to have handy in the gallery. That is all that is required of you. The rest you can leave to me.”

Sybil, still flushed up to the temples, played nervously with her fan, without making any reply. She understood perfectly clearly that her mother’s aim being accomplished would mean the consummation of her happiness ; and yet something within her rebelled. She was too honest perfectly to acquiesce in the plan of campaign sketched out, at the same time that she was too weak to stand up for her own opinion. Never had this queen-like creature spoken a truer word than when she

described herself as a fraud. Small blame to her fellow-men and women if instinctively they looked for heroic deeds from her, whereas in reality her's was a perfectly true, even tender, but ordinary and timid nature, weighed down by a touch of indolence which made her shun everything approaching to an effort.

"By the way, I was nearly forgetting, there is another point. You know, of course, that you are going to the county ball on the 12th; but what you possibly do not know is, that you have promised Captain Stenning both a round and a square."

"But it is not *true*!" broke from Sybil's lips, with a ring that was almost vigorous enough to be called indignation.

"Not strictly speaking, perhaps; but it is expedient, which, in this case, is of greater importance. With some men the experiment might be dangerous, but I have studied this case, and I think he is far gone enough for anything. Mind you make no mistake—a round and a square."

Still that silent fingering of the fan, while the lace on the bosom of her dress rose and fell somewhat more rapidly than usual.

"Have I made myself clearly understood?" asked Mrs. Durrant, with painful distinctness, while she watched Sybil's downcast face.

The girl looked up quickly, and for one brief second the glance of mother and daughter crossed with a faint suggestion of defiance. The next moment already Sybil knew that she had been mad to dream of resistance, even for the space of two heartbeats.

"Very well, mamma," she whispered, submissively.

"I suppose it is scarcely necessary to tell you that of course you know nothing of your father's intentions, so that, the point once come to, mind you don't let yourself go too cheaply. Most women make the mistake of pouring themselves out in a torrent, instead of doling themselves out in spoonfuls."

There was another "Very well, mamma," as Sybil turned away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLUE SERGE.

It so happened that the blue serge was not destined to undergo much hard work. In fact, the creases, which a long period of repose had wrought among its folds, had not even had time to be shaken out, when already its mission of usefulness was fulfilled.

When Bernard arrived at The Monastery on the following afternoon, armed with the fuchsia cuttings, which provided him with so welcome an excuse for repeating his yesterday's visit, there was nothing to warn him of the approach of fate. The long gallery was deserted, as usual, and as usual, too, one of the tables was littered with flowers. The sight of the very first snowdrops of the season gave him a passing thrill, and stirred within him a vague but agreeable memory.

In the drawing-room, where a wood fire was comfortably crackling, Mrs. Durrant was, as usual, dozing in the window-embrasure, and, as usual, too, Miss Durrant was occupied with some elegant needle-work. Mr. Durrant having, as usual, been summoned by James, began to make the most faultless conversation.

If there was any difference, it was only that the topics did not come quite so readily as they ordinarily did, and had Bernard been in a more observant frame of mind, he might have noticed that Mr. Durrant cleared his throat somewhat suspiciously often, and sent an inquiring glance towards the window-embrasure about once in every two minutes.

It was not until the tea was being poured out that something like animation entered into the talk.

"It was very kind of you to remember about the fuchsias," Mr. Durrant remarked, for about the fourth time. "By the way," and he cleared his throat in a manner which sounded final, "does your gardener happen to have any camellias over? Ours have not been successful this winter, and I believe I am

not betraying a state secret when I whisper into your ear that a supply is very badly wanted for the 12th."

"But, papa—" began Sybil, looking up from her work.

"Miss Durrant," said Bernard, reproachfully, "do you think it was either right or kind of you to keep this secret from me? Denman has lots of camellias. For which day do you say you want them?"

"For the 12th," answered Mr. Durrant, pleasantly.

"The 12th—all right. You shall have a cartload of them," began Bernard, enthusiastically, then abruptly broke off. "The 12th," and he tugged rather hard at his moustache. "Let me see, isn't that the day they've settled to have that silly dance?"

"If by this designation you mean the county ball—"

"And Miss Durrant is going?"

"Oh, Sybil is looking forward greatly to the change. Aren't you, Sybil?"

"Yes, papa," murmured Sybil, bending over the urn.

"She is certain to be disappointed. It's the dullest thing out, believe me," and he turned quickly towards Mrs. Durrant. "Music, floor, supper—each will be the very poorest specimen of its kind.

"Sybil is not particular," her mamma placidly replied.

"Are you, Sybil?"

"No, mamma!"

"And as for dancers, there's scarcely one that deserves such an appellation. You'll have your toes trodden off, Miss Durrant; it's a peculiarity of the neighbourhood."

"Fortunately," observed Mr. Durrant, somewhat hurriedly, "our hopes are not confined to the neighbourhood alone. I have heard Captain Stenning spoken of as a splendid waltzer."

"Stenning? Stenning? Isn't that the huge fellow with the grin? You have been deceived in the blackest fashion, Mr. Durrant. I am ready to stake my honour that if he dances at all, his performances will not surpass those of a dancing bear."

"Sybil," said the voice from the window-embasure, "have you done arranging the flowers for the dinner-table?"

"Not yet, mamma."

Five minutes later Bernard, stepping out of the drawing-room in a distinctly ill-used frame of mind, was aware of a sudden and very pleasant transformation of his inner man. That dark-blue figure whose hands were filled with snow-drops, how deliciously familiar it was !

As a matter of course he approached the table near which she was standing.

"By the way, I forgot to ask you whether the camellias were to be white or red ?"

"Whichever you like ; it really does not matter," she stammered in reply.

"Of what importance can my likings or dislikings be, since I am not to see them on you ? Would it not be more to the point to consult Captain Stenning's taste ?"

He was a little horrified with himself when he had said it, not having been aware of intending any such downright rudeness.

Sybil looked up in confusion, with a glance which seemed to be asking for mercy. The move had not been prescribed by her mother, but it was not without its effect.

Bernard went on speaking with flying pulses and grating voice, aware that he was losing hold over himself.

"What is the use of trying to look unhappy, when you have just been proclaiming your delight at this festivity of the 12th, and when, no doubt, your card is already filled to overflowing ?"

"Oh, no," breathed Sybil, plunging her hands into the flowers.

"Surely you are not going to tell me that you have not given away a dance yet ?"

She threw a scared glance towards the drawing-room door.

"Only a round and a square," she whispered hurriedly, at the same time crushing two handfuls of hepaticas into two unsightly blue lumps.

"And the name of the fortunate man ?"

Again that dumb entreaty for mercy and again not understood.

"It was—it was Captain Stenning."

There followed about a minute's silence, during which Bernard chewed his moustache, not trusting himself to speak. Mechanically Sybil's fingers were moving about among the flowers, and mechanically Bernard's eyes were following them. It never occurred to either of them that she was decapitating the snowdrops in the most heartless fashion, nor that the hepaticas were being arranged in vases without water.

While he stood thus and watched the long, white fingers and listened to the branches of the ash-tree outside tapping against the tall window, Bernard, to his astonishment, almost to his disgust, became aware that his bad temper was yielding to a second relapse of soothing memories.

"Do you know that the wind was blowing in just this way on the day when I first saw you?" he began after that pause. "I am not sure that this is not the anniversary of the day."

As he said it a sudden blaze of inspiration illumined his mind. With a most grateful distinctness he recognised that he had been a fool all along, and that, considering that this had been the wish of his father's heart, there could be no disrespect to his memory implied by hurrying on events a little.

Sybil was trembling too much to make any reply. She snatched at a bunch of snowdrops, but before she reached it her hand was taken prisoner with a vigour so muscular as to be almost painful.

"Sybil, tell me the truth: would it be too great a sacrifice for you not to go?"

"I—I don't quite understand."

"Yes, you do. To the dance, Sybil. For my sake, remember, it would make me so happy; somehow I can't bear the idea, and I'm afraid I'm making a terrible mess of it, but I'm sure there can't be any mistake. It isn't asking too much, is it?"

Sybil was trembling violently, and yet, despite this, now that the critical moment had come, the woman's self-possession had proved itself to be superior to that of the man. It is generally the party whose affections are most deeply engaged who makes the greatest display of himself. Bernard was

stammering like a schoolboy, and was aware of something hot and wet under his eyelids. Sybil, on the contrary, retained just sufficient presence of mind to extract her fingers from his agonising clasp.

"But, Mr. Berrincott—why should I? I mean—what difference can it make to you?"

"What difference? Bless me, haven't I explained? Because I love you, Sybil, more than the whole of the world put together, or than any number of worlds that exist anywhere else, as those astronomical fellows are always saying. I thought I had begun by saying that. But you won't go to that dance, will you? I know you won't. I'm quite sure that you care for me a little tiny bit, my darling. A-a-ah!"

Again there passed a minute, during which nothing was spoken, and nothing heard in the gallery but the tapping of the twigs upon the window.

It was Sybil's voice that first broke silence.

"Oh, no, no," she began a little breathlessly, at the same time smoothing her hair with one hand, while with the other she felt for her collar, "I did not mean that, Mr. Berrincott, I had forgotten."

"Bernard," suggested that gentleman, in an accent of tender reproach.

"Not yet, oh, I can't. You mustn't ask me. I only meant to say that if papa is agreed, I should have no objection to—to your caring for me. But of course it does not really count until you have spoken to him."

"Which I shall do immediately, never fear, my love. But in the meantime you can't be so cruel as to object to my being happy; to tell you the truth, I'm not in near such a funk about your father as I suppose I ought to be, certainly in not near such a funk as I was of you. Only one more, my darling, there isn't a soul in sight, and I swear it shall be the last."

"No, no, Bern—I mean Mr. Berrincott. I am really quite serious when I tell you that everything depends on papa's decision."

"And supposing it does? Have you any special reason

for imagining that he objects to me?" He laughed with an almost impertinent lightheartedness as he put the question, "Is that a door opening? In the name of everything inopportune, I believe it is. My darling, I must be gone. On second thoughts, I'll put off the interview till to-morrow. I'm pretty sure I couldn't be coherent to-day; my brain is going round and round in a circle. I didn't know happiness could make one so drunk. Air will put me right again. Is this the way to the door? At peep of day to-morrow, I'll be over."

He had turned and gone two steps down the gallery, walking, indeed, like a man who is not quite sober, when Sybil came after him, breathlessly.

"Bernard," she began, on some sudden impulse, "I can't bear your going away like that; I want to tell you that—that—about those two dances, you know."

"Still hankering after them?" asked Bernard, with perfect good-temper now. After all he had never had any serious anxiety about that huge Captain Stenning.

"No; what I wanted to say was that it wasn't true, at least it was all a mistake about my having given two dances to Captain Stenning."

"Was it? So much the better," murmured Bernard, in blissful contentedness, his attention entirely taken up with a wisp of silky black hair which strayed loosely over her cheek.

At that moment the distant door was heard again, and the interrupted retreat was hastily resumed.

"It hasn't done any harm, but that's no thanks to me," was the remark which Sybil made to herself as she stood alone in the gallery. "I suppose mamma would kill me if she knew."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. SILKWORTH'S GOLD-MINE.

WHILE Sybil was making these remarks to herself in the gallery, Bernard had reached the open air, almost at a run. Never in his life before had he felt so like choking, and, considering the whirling movement of his brain and the unsteadiness of his legs, he was thankful that he had retained sufficient presence of mind to put off till to-morrow his interview with Mr. Durrant. Solitude and the open air were the two things which at this moment he craved for with something like the hunger of a famished man. Even to get out of Sybil's presence was an unspeakable relief, for to be happy is an accomplishment which requires a great deal more practice than is generally supposed.

To judge from the appearance of the long deserted avenue, Bernard was going to be amply provided with the desired solitude, while the same blustering March gale, which had rapped the ash-twigs against the window, seemed to be doing its best to cool his throbbing temples.

It was not until with huge steps he had strode round the first bend of the avenue that he became aware of a man in a grey overcoat, sitting on a tree-stump and digging holes in the ground with the point of his stick. The attitude seemed to imply that he was waiting for something or somebody, and in any case this was not the sort of day that people generally select for sitting on tree-stumps unless they have some object in view.

Bernard's first impulse was one of irritation. So distasteful was the idea of his solitude being even indirectly disturbed that he instinctively stood still and looked round to see whether there was any way of cutting across the grass and regaining the avenue somewhere lower down, below the garden wall, perhaps.

At the same moment the man in the grey overcoat raised his head, and, seeing Bernard, immediately stood up from his

tree-stump and went on waiting, though now in a more definite and less desultory manner.

Bernard, meanwhile, had resumed his progress down the avenue, partly because there was no convenient short-cut within sight, and partly because he was half-ashamed of his childishness. The hesitation had lasted but an instant, the next already he was striding on at his former pace, and plunged back again into his former blissful reflections. What possible concern of his could that big grey-coated individual down there be? Most likely he was a genteel beggar lying in wait for the Durrant's carriage.

So completely had Bernard dismissed the individual from his thoughts by the time he reached the tree-stump aforementioned, that it was almost with a start that he looked up on hearing himself addressed.

"Mr. Berrincott, if you please, sirr."

The voice was not quite abject enough for a beggar; also it struck Bernard, as a passing thought, that he had heard it before, and not so very long ago, either. The grey-coated individual, instead of standing to one side, hat in hand, as would have been the natural thing, had planted himself squarely across the middle of the avenue, and retained his hat—which curiously enough was a straw one—well pulled forward over his forehead.

"Let me pass, I am in a hurry," said Bernard, in some surprise, though his attention was as yet too little engaged by the incident to let him feel angry.

"In a hurry? So am I—in a hurry for my dinner. My dinner. My teeth have been chattering here long enough in your honour. You can pass when you've heard my story, but not before."

On any other day of his life Bernard would probably in reply have knocked him down; to-day he simply shrugged his shoulders and pulled out his purse.

"Will a shilling do?"

"No, it will not do."

"Half-a-crown, then? You've hit upon a remarkably lucky moment, my friend. I can't bear to think of any one

being hungry to-day. Come now, it *is* money you want, isn't it !”

“Yes, it *is* money I want ; but neither your shillings, nor half-crowns will do for me. You'll have to open your gold-bags a precious deal wider than *that*, I can tell you, before you're done with me. Serves you right, too, for chucking me over your door-sill yesterday, as though I'd been a mangy dog.”

“Oh, you're the West Indian fellow, are you ?” said Bernard whose patience was beginning to give way, and who would probably have recognised Mr. Silkworth more readily, had not the damp cloths, laid on over night in preparation for to-day's interview, done their work with such bewildering thoroughness. “I have no time to listen to you now. Will you be so kind as to stand aside, Mr. Silkworth,” he added, with ominous calmness.

“Not quite yet, Mr. Berrincott, ha, ha! Mr. *Berrincott*,” repeated the manager, laying an apparently imbecile emphasis upon each syllable. “What a first-class joke it is, to be sure ! Has it ever occurred to you that it's nothing but the purest courtesy that moves me to address you so ? Ha, ha ! The West Indian fellow may end by turning out very much more inconvenient than you have any idea of at present.” And Mr. Silkworth held his two sides and positively reeled with glee.

“You told me just now that you have not had your dinner,” remarked Bernard ; “but I think you must be mistaken ; or, at any rate, you have had a few glasses more of something than you are used to taking. I should advise an hour's sound sleep before night. Some people recommend black coffee, I believe.”

“I'll show you in the twinkling of an eyelid whether I'm drunk or not,” said Mr. Silkworth, recovering his gravity with a sort of jerk. “You know, don't you, that your father was married to a West Indian wife before he brought home the second Mrs. Simon, who became your mother ?”

“Well, and what of that ?”

"Only this: have you ever seen the certificate of her death?"

"Certainly not; why should I?"

"For no particular reason that I know of, except that it's generally considered more on the square to have a certificate forthcoming."

"If you're going to come out with some fairy-tale about her having got out of her grave again, please be quick, for this breeze isn't exactly balmy."

"That's not at all what I'm going to do. Why, I saw the first Mrs. Simon put into her grave with my own eyes. But what I wanted to say to you, was that she wasn't put there until ever so much later than you have been led to suppose; certainly not until the second Mrs. Simon had done standing in front of the altar with your father."

As he said it he burrowed with his hands a little deeper in his pockets, and settled himself into a new attitude, in expectation of the effect of his words.

There was not much effect to be seen. Bernard looked up and down him slowly, as though taking his measure.

"I think I should try that cup of black coffee, if I were you," he then observed deliberately. "You evidently don't know what you are talking about. Everybody knows that my father was a widower for at least a couple of years before his marriage. I'm sure I don't know why I'm taking the trouble to tell you this. You have your stars to thank for my being in a super-humanly good temper to-day. And now, good morning; even *my* patience is at an end. You had better take care in case of a carriage coming down the avenue; the coachman mightn't see you in time to pull up the horses."

And, pushing past Mr. Silkworth with a rapid movement, Bernard set off again at a swinging pace, heading in the direction of the ivy-covered garden wall, round which the avenue at this place took a sharp curve.

But he had forgotten that Mr. Silkworth's legs were quite as long as his own. In less than half-a-dozen strides the manager had overtaken him.

"But, Mr. Berrincott, Sir, or whatever your legal appella-

tion ought to be," he began speaking more hurriedly now, "upon my soul I'm not joking, there really has been some grand mistake somewhere. I always knew that your father had made pretty sharp work of marrying again, though it wasn't till ever so much later that we got the news of it—quite in a round-about way, I might say, and of course no one had any call to examine the dates. But I've done that now, and I swear to you that your father's first wife did not die till the June of '59 ; the *end* of June '59."

"Swear it to some one else," said Bernard, striding on at the same pace. "I have no time for fairy tales."

"That is exactly what I am going to do," broke out Mr. Silkworth, whose eyes were beginning to roll and his teeth to gleam ; "why the devil should I hold my tongue unless you make it worth my while to do so ?"

At this point Bernard stopped short suddenly, for he had something to say, and felt instinctively that he could speak with more emphasis thus than when covering the ground at the rate of ten miles an hour.

"Look here," he said with great deliberation, "up till now you have been almost amusing, but now you are beginning to be distinctly too much for my temper. If you imagine that by trumping up old legends about my father's first wife you'll scare me into paying you hush-money, then all I've got to say——"

"Not so loud," interrupted Mr. Silkworth, in a harsh whisper, dropping his hand on Bernard's arm. "I'll be blowed if there isn't some one on the other side of that wall," and he rolled his eyes uneasily towards the garden wall beside which they were now standing, and from beyond which certain subdued sounds were audible, of which it was difficult to say whether they were caused by the wind among the peach-branches or by the grating of a ladder against the stones.

"I don't care whether there are a hundred people on the other side of that wall," retorted Bernard, speaking if possible with a greater distinctness than before ; "and they are welcome to open their two hundred ears so far as any secrets of *mine* are concerned, or any calumnies of *yours* regarding my

father's antecedents. This is all I have got to say. And now if you do not stand aside I give you my honour as an English gentleman that I will knock you down; and I believe I can do it too, though you're half a head taller than I am."

In the next minute Bernard was striding down the avenue, alone this time, and Mr. Silkworth, livid with rage, and looking curiously like a washed-out negro, was shaking a not over clean fist at his back.

Had he not been so much engrossed by this occupation it might possibly have occurred to the ex-manager to glance upwards at the garden-wall, in which case the sight of a battered felt hat, a pair of startled eyes and half a nose emerging from over the topmost ivy-twigs would have been pretty certain to give him an unpleasant turn.

CHAPTER XV.

PODSKIN.

ON the evening of the same day on which Bernard had been brought to the point, Mrs. Durrant settled herself down with a sigh of extra comfort in front of her toilet-table, in order to have what remained of her once plentiful black hair brushed out for the night.

Toilet-tables are generally white, or at any rate clothed in light-coloured chintz, but this toilet-table was not as other toilet-tables, being as nearly dusky in its draperies as it is possible for a toilet-table to be. It matched the rest of the room, as indeed the room matched every other room in the house. Visitors were at first apt to be puzzled by the species of family resemblance that existed between all the apartments at the Monastery. Mrs. Durrant was an eminently strong-minded woman, but she suffered from one weakness. Though her husband had long since retired from business, she could never quite forget what that business had been, and instinctively she avoided the appearance of everything too light and bright, as

being too suggestive of soap. In spirit she could not help guessing at flippant jokes being made as to people who got their soap cheap; and in her nervous dread of things appearing too well washed, she would rather have risked dust and grime. The result was a predilection for gloomy tints, and a careful avoidance of such things as white curtains, or even light wall-paper.

The dusky toilet-table played a considerable part in Mrs. Durrant's life. It was when she settled down in front of it at night, that she was used to cast a critical glance backwards over the day that was past, and to decide whether it had been a success or not. The one that had just come to an end had unquestionably been successful, hence that sigh of extra comfort with which the mental review closed to-day.

The glance backwards was followed by a glance forwards,—not into the future, however, but into the toilet-mirror on the table. This, too, was a habit quite as ancient as the other, and almost as ancient as the venerable Podskin herself, whose skinny fingers daily moved deftly among the scanty black locks, and had been used to move there since the time when the locks had been luxuriant, and they themselves almost plump. Ever since those bygone days this faithful servant had been the one link between the upper and the lower regions, the only one among those who received the retired soap-boiler's pay who knew that her mistress was not so sleepy as she looked.

Podskin was useful in more ways than one, having a well-developed vision and an excellent sense of hearing which were entirely at Mrs. Durrant's service. Through this medium it was that that lady was warned of any undue consumption of tea and sugar in the servants' hall, just as it was through the aforementioned eyes and ears that she was kept informed of the private doings of her visitors.

Despite the long-standing intimacy between mistress and maid, Podskin was a great deal too decorous to think of opening the conversation herself, but the glance into the mirror never failed to disclose whether or not there was any reason

for Mrs. Durrant doing so. What that lady saw there to-day was too distinct to be mistaken. The long thin nose that drooped above her own head was almost wagging with badly suppressed excitement, while the sunken lips were closed in what evidently was a heroic effort not to speak until addressed.

To Mrs. Durrant's eyes the situation was so obvious that she began without preliminary—

“Well, Podskin, what is it?”

The words were scarcely spoken when already the barrier had fallen with a rush.

“It's rather an out-of-the-way thing, ma'am, to say the truth, though of course its very likely only a little muddling up of dates, to be sure. Hindeed, I don't see as 'ow it can very well be anythin' else, considerin' what the consequences would be to Mr. Berrincott. And Jebb isn't the man either, whose word I'd take at the first sayin'. My opinion is that he's apt to know more about things inside the garden-wall than outside it.”

“Be a little more explicit, please,” said Mrs. Durrant, a trifle severely. “You are talking of Jebb, the under-gardener, I presume?”

“Of him, ma'am, exactly. It was this afternoon, and he was busy with the peaches on the south wall, tying the new twigs on to the trellis, when all at once he hears steps coming down the avenue at a great rate and some one saying: “And I swear to you that your father's first wife didn't die till the June of '59”; and in the same minute the voices had got just to the other side of the wall and some one else almost shouted out somethin' about legends being trumped up, and his not going to be frightened into paying hush-money. And the voice that spoke first also said: ‘Why the devil should I hold my tongue, unless it's made worth my while?’ or words to that effect,—and it ended up by their offering to knock each other down, and when Jebb, half-scared as he was, looked over the wall, he saw young Mr. Berrincott swinging off down the avenue, and a man in a straw hat shaking his fist at his back. Leastways that's the story he brought into the servants’

hall this evening, when he was up at the house with the grapes for dessert."

Podskin paused for breath and peered inquiringly over her lady's head into the toilet-mirror, though, to be sure, she might have known by this time that there never was anything to be seen there.

There was a short pause, during which Mrs. Durrant stared impassively at the rings on her hands. Then she remarked with equal impassibility—

"That sounds very much like a got-up story."

"Don't it, ma'am? And I never even should have bothered you with it, if it hadn't been for the Thornton Bessie having been over here this afternoon, looking in upon our Minnie, as she sometimes does, and she was tellin' a story about a man with a straw hat who had walked in upon them yesterday at dinner-time, and who had turned out to be the West Indian manager, and had made some queer remarks about the late Mr. Berrincott's first wife, which had somehow puzzled even Mrs. Spankins. And I couldn't help fancyin' that this kind o' tallied, specially with the straw 'at; and so, since you generally like to know things, ma'am, I thought I'd just be so free as to mention it."

"You were quite right," said Mrs. Durrant, in her deepest bass tones, while the eyes of mistress and maid met in the glass.

There was nothing more said while Podskin finished her task. When the last wisps of hair were settled for the night she began to move about the room, making some final preparations. Mrs. Durrant remained sitting in front of the toilet-table in deep reflection. She was already enveloped in her dressing-gown, a rich ruby-coloured garment, which suffered from the same absence of high lights as did the room, not having been granted so much as a lace tucker at the throat. This was the stage at which Podskin was generally dismissed; to-day Mrs. Durrant seemed to have forgotten to speak the releasing word, and Podskin herself had an air of expecting something more to come. This time it was the maid who broke the silence.

"If you please, ma'am, it *is* a fact, is it not, that young Mr. Berrincott's father began by being married to a West Indian wife?"

"I believe it is."

"Ah, well, it's not to be wondered at that folk should make up tales. Is there anythin' more you want, ma'am?"

She had reached the door when her mistress's voice called her back.

"Podskin, do you know where Mr. Durrant is?"

"In the smoking-room, I believe, ma'am."

"Go there immediately and tell him I wish to speak to him before going to sleep."

When Podskin had closed the door behind her, Mrs. Durrant continued to gaze at her rings. What she was saying to herself was this—

"After all, there is nothing like being on the safe side."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHITE CAMELLIAS.

WHEN Bernard opened his eyes on the morrow of his latest visit to the Monastery, it was to greet the early daylight as no daylight had ever before been greeted by him. The day of his betrothal! How considerate of that blustering March wind to have laid itself to rest for the occasion!

Not once did Mr. Silkworth's figure darken his exultation. If he thought of him at all, it was to smile at his yesterday's adventure, and to wonder at the strange forms which eccentricity is apt to take.

Having by a tremendous outlay of self-control forced himself to wait until a reasonable portion of the forenoon had elapsed, and armed with a large bouquet of white camellias, he at length started for the Monastery. The camellias had been thought of in a moment of inspiration. It had struck him as a peculiarly happy thought that his first gift to Sybil should be those very

flowers, the mention of which had yesterday indirectly led to the crisis ; and what was happiest of all about the thought was that every one of these dazzling blossoms should shine and fade in Sybil's hair or on her breast unseen by Captain Stenning. Poor wretch ! How his grin would fade when he got the news that that round and that square on the 12th were not for him ! Oh no, by-the-bye, that had been a mistake, Sybil said. What could she have meant, exactly ? Surely the queen of his heart had not been fibbing ? He laughed as he put the question to himself. This was not a day on which it was possible to find fault with anything. And yet even *she* could not be allowed to fib. He would make her confess, he told himself with a mixture of tenderness and amusement, and straightway fell to picturing to himself what she would be doing and how she would be looking when first his eyes should fall on her to-day. The picture, indeed, was pretty nearly ready-made. It was so difficult to imagine her doing anything but leisurely disposing flowers in a vase, and—well, nothing else, in particular, except being beautiful. What need either ? Were there not plain women enough in the world for the more prosaic occupations ?

By the time he had reached The Monastery his impatience had become almost unbearable. His first glance down the gallery showed him that no flowers were being arranged to-day. Mr. Durrant was waiting for him in the library, the footman informed him. So much the better, was Bernard's reflection ; all the less loss of time.

The heavy oaken door was scarcely closed behind him when already he was hurrying forward towards the tall figure by the writing-table. What with the joyful smile on his face and the white camellias in his hands he had about him something of the air of a happy boy, laden with birthday greetings and hastening to his father's arms.

"You know why I have come," was all he said, in a voice that shook with eagerness.

Mr. Durrant retreated a little nearer to his writing-table, for Bernard, in truth, did not look as if he were going to stop short of an embrace.

"I believe I am aware——" he began, a little nervously.

"Sybil has told you everything, has she not?"

"My daughter certainly informed me of——"

"And you have no objection to our happiness?"

Mr. Durrant made a further step backwards, for Bernard was still pressing on.

"Forgive me, but you seem to take a great deal for granted."

The words were the first which succeeded in reaching more than Bernard's ear. Up to this moment he had been too entirely blinded by his own exultation to notice that his reception was other than he had pictured it. Now, something like a first sobering of the senses came to his aid. Very likely he had been making a fool of himself—he acknowledged it freely; he should have remembered that the old soap-boiler was a stickler for the proprieties. Well, the want was easily supplied. Here goes!

"I have been a little too quick about it," he said, struggling to look at least decently grave; "but I am sure you will pardon me. Of course, I should have begun by telling you that I love your daughter, that I am happy enough to have gained her love, and that I am come to request your consent to our union."

"There is some slight mistake here," put in Mr. Durrant uneasily. "My daughter is not likely to have acknowledged sentiments of the sort you describe, so long as——"

"Of course not; she has acknowledged nothing—I have only guessed; but I don't think I have made a mistake, and—well, can't you understand that these five miles over have seemed just interminable, and that I am dying for a chance of laying these flowers at Sybil's feet?"

"I am afraid there will have to be rather more delay than you suppose. Will you take a seat, Mr. Berrincott? There are unfortunately some matters which it is my duty to discuss with you."

"Settlements, of course," thought Bernard. "Hang it all! couldn't that have stood over a bit?" Aloud he began: "As far as any conditions are concerned, you have only got to——"

"There *is* a condition," interrupted Mr. Durrant almost eagerly. The truth is, he had been torturing his brain for a plausible way of opening an exceedingly delicate subject, and the word "condition" seemed to furnish him with what he wanted. "There *is* a condition attached to my consent, but it is not of the sort you suppose."

This time Bernard made no immediate reply. At length his attention was seriously aroused.

"Do you mean that you have any objection to make to me?" he asked in an accent of such genuine surprise that it would have been impossible to find therein any trace of conceit.

"To you personally, none at all—pray be assured of that."

"Then is there anything in my position or fortune that does not suit your views?"

He could scarcely keep from smiling as he said it, and it was hard to believe his eyes, when, instead of hurrying out a second assurance, Mr. Durrant, who as usual had sat down precisely in the middle of his chair, began nervously to cross and recross his legs.

"None to your position as it is, of course; but what I expect of you is to prove to me that nothing which may happen, can ever oust you from your present place."

"Nothing but an earthquake that swallowed up Thornton. I am afraid I cannot pledge my honour as a gentleman that such a thing won't come to pass."

Mr. Durrant once more shifted his left leg over his right.

"Your mother was your father's second wife, was she not?" he inquired in his smoothest tones.

"Yes."

"And his first wife died in the West Indies?"

Bernard stared back in silence. He was beginning to see daylight. Since the passing thought which he had spent upon him in the morning, Mr. Silkworth had faded completely from his mind. Later on, when to-day's urgent mission was fulfilled, the story of his yesterday's adventure would very

likely be told as a good joke : the idea of making a secret of it would certainly not have occurred to him.

"Do you mean to say that you have been listening to those nonsensical stories?"

"*Listening* is scarcely the word, but there is something between that, surely, and forcibly closing up one's ears. There are tales afloat, Mr. Berrincott,—mind, I believe them to be no more than empty tales—but which make it my duty to investigate matters further before sanctioning my daughter's engagement."

"I suppose it's from Silkworth you got your information?"

The right leg resumed its place over the left.

"I certainly have had some talk with Mr. Silkworth. You see, when a man comes to you with so startling a story, and especially at so critical a juncture——"

"You consider it your duty not to turn him out—exactly. Well, what were the points of his tale?"

"He says that your father's first wife did not die until the end of June, '59."

Bernard watched the fire for a minute, then looked up straight into Mr. Durrant's face.

"Then what you mean to tell me is that that man's story has made you doubt whether my father was ever legally married to my mother?"

"Not *doubt*—oh, no, certainly not *doubt*—that expression is a great deal too strong for the occasion; but at the same time I must confess that to see all idle reports put to rest once and for all would——"

"Make your mind easier—just so. Well, there is no reason why your mind should not be made easier," and Bernard rose quickly to his feet. "The certificate of burial of my father's first wife is all that will be wanted, I presume. Oh, Mr. Durrant, why didn't you speak out sooner? Do you know that you almost gave me a fright?"

He laughed as he spoke; his tone had regained its former joyous ring.

"Then you think there will be no great difficulty?" asked

Mr. Durrant, brightening up, for his hopes and wishes were most sincerely on Bernard's side. "How are you going to set about it?"

"I am going to write to Mr. Parker, or, better still, I shall look in upon him myself. Among the mountains of family papers in his office the certificate we want can't well fail to exist. You see, it isn't as though my father's first marriage had been kept dark. There was no mystery about the Creole wife's existence, so why should there have been any mystery about her death?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Mr. Durrant. "And yet where there is so much smoke there generally is a little fire," he added to himself.

Bernard now somewhat hurriedly took his departure, and Mrs. Durrant, who appeared in the library before he had closed the front-door, listened without comment to a report of the proceedings. While Mr. Durrant was speaking, her eye fell on the white camellias on the table.

"What are these?"

"Young Berrincott left them here—for Sybil, of course, poor boy!"

"I wonder if they would keep till the 12th?" said Mrs. Durrant, pensively regarding the flowers.

"But I thought Sybil was not going on the 12th?"

"I thought so too, but that was when I thought that her engagement was an accomplished fact. Sir Norman Vallington is to be there on the 12th, and he has not yet seen Sybil."

"I have every hope that Mr. Parker will be able to clear up this matter with perfect ease," said Mr. Durrant, for him almost hotly.

"So have I; but there never yet has been any harm in having two strings to one's bow. You don't count upon Sybil remaining an old maid, do you, even in the unlikely contingency—and yet it *is* a contingency—of this cock and bull sounding story turning out not to be cock and bull?"

Mr. Durrant, having no reply to make, had as usual to bow to his wife's superior wisdom.

"Cotton-wool laid over the blossoms is the best way of preserving them," she said, still gazing at the camellias. "They would make a splendid show on Sybil's dress. And yet I almost wish they had been red ; these flowers look so painfully clean."

On the following day Bernard was back again at The Monastery. He had not come over from Thornton this time, but had walked straight up from the station, being on his way back from the consultation with Mr. Parker. To-day he was looking a trifle, but only a trifle, more subdued than yesterday. This affair was, after all, going to be a good deal of a bore ; not to be shaken off like an unwelcome drop, as he had at first supposed. Mr. Parker could throw no light on the matter. Twenty-five years ago he had not yet been in charge of the family affairs, but he was positive as to no copy of the desired certificate existing within the four walls of his office.

"All this entails the deuce of a delay," explained Bernard. "I shall write to my uncle James, who is at St. Clara now, and ask him to take the matter in hand. I wonder how long it will take. I don't believe they keep their registers over carefully out there ; Uncle James will have to dig about a lot—no," he broke off with a change of tone, "I shall not write to Uncle James ; I shall go out myself. It will be the quickest way in the end."

"Go out to the West Indies ?" asked Mr. Durrant, rather taken aback.

"Certainly. Why on earth should I not ?"

And now the plan was taken into immediate consideration. Having once made up his mind to the voyage, Bernard, whose joyous humour of yesterday had now almost returned to him, was in a terrible hurry to carry out his idea. He would go by the very next mail, the one of the middle of the month.

"And shall I wire 'all right,' when I have looked at the registers ?"

"Certainly, if it *is* all right."

"And if I come back with the certificate in my pocket, you will give me your daughter ?"

"With all my heart."

Bernard grasped his hand gratefully. At the last moment he turned with his fingers on the door-handle.

"Of course, I shall come over again; and there is one thing more—I may say good-bye to her, may I not?"

Mr. Durrant hesitated, but Bernard's eyes were too much for him.

"Very well. But of course you will remember that the engagement is purely conditional."

Mrs. Durrant was not overpleased on hearing of the permission granted. In her opinion Mr. Durrant had been weak.

"However, Sybil shall receive her instructions," she decided, "so I daresay no harm will be done."

Although Bernard knew that the Royal Mail was not likely to hurry its movements on his account, he started for London only two days after his second interview with Mr. Durrant. He did not see Mr. Silkworth again, although that gentleman was still in the neighbourhood, being in fact established on The Monastery estate, where he had received some subordinate appointment. Mrs. Durrant had thought it more prudent, for the sake of the dignity of the Durrant name, to keep the West Indian manager's tongue tied, by more than merely passing means, on the subject of the events which had followed upon Podskin's first report.

When the moment of final farewell came, Bernard's voice was almost strangled in his throat. Not that he had any doubts as to the result of his voyage—oh, no! But he knew that he would not be back before six weeks at the earliest, and so much can happen in six weeks!

"Say that you will be true to me," he said, very low and rather huskily.

"But, Mr. Berrincott, how can I say that, since we are not engaged?"

Her voice was not much steadier than his own, and yet she nervously withdrew the hand he had attempted to grasp. It was almost a *tête-à-tête*, since in the drawing-room adjoining the one in which they stood and divided from it by heavy

curtains there was no one but Mrs. Durrant, dozing in her chair.

"By Jove! I forgot. No, of course I have no right to ask that; but cannot you at least say that you will not forget me?"

"I shall never do that," whispered Sybil; then, with a glance towards the curtains, she added quickly: "I mean that of course one never forgets one's friends in such a short time. Six weeks is nothing, you know."

"It doesn't seem to me at all like nothing," said Bernard, surprised and almost a little hurt. "I don't at all know how I am to get through the time. I am afraid—no, I oughtn't to say that—I fancy you will have less difficulty in that way."

He looked at her eagerly, hoping for a denial, but Sybil stood silent, her clasped hands hanging before her, her head with its diadem of hair drooping slightly on her breast, like a queen whose crown has grown too heavy to bear. The realisation of her beauty failed, at this moment, to soothe Bernard.

"You will arrange your flowers and you will take your walks," he went on, with almost a touch of bitterness in his tone, and speaking on some impulse which surprised himself, "and you will go out driving when I am away, exactly the same as when I am there. I wish I knew whether my going away makes any difference at all to you!"

He broke off, for Sybil for all reply had looked up at him in dumb reproach. He was almost certain that he saw a tear shining upon her magnificent eyelashes. Instantly he recognised that he was a heartless monster.

"Sybil—Miss Durrant, I mean—forgive me. I am talking nonsense and behaving like a fool altogether; but a man is apt to feel sore at a moment like this, and even suspicious. By-the-bye," he asked abruptly, "how about the ball on the 12th?"

"I would much rather not go, but I am afraid I shall have to."

"Have to? Why on earth should you go against your own inclination?"

"Mamma says that my not being there would make people talk."

"Well, why shouldn't they if it amuses them? Would it be so very dreadful if they guessed that we cared for each other?"

"Oh, you must not say that, please! You know that nothing of that—that sort was to be said between us at present. You promised, you know."

"So I did. I am a fool. I had better be going. I am sure to be saying more forbidden things if I stay any longer. I hope you will enjoy your ball."

He had almost turned away, under a fresh impulse of irritation, when once more contrition came over him. He stooped and took her hand.

"Forgive me again. You know all that I would like to say and may not. But I must not stay longer. To talk to you as to any other friend is too hard a task for me. Good-bye."

Without waiting for her answering good-bye, he had turned now definitely, and in another moment was gone from the room.

"And high time, too," was Mrs. Durrant's reflection, as she heaved a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XVII.

"MISS MERCURY."

SINCE she had come to Lot 13, Marian had got used to early rising. Her first glimpse of the place had been a disappointment, but the longer she was here—and it was now a full fortnight since their arrival, the more wonders did she discover.

Without these daily—nay, hourly—discoveries her life would have been almost more monotonous than at Laurel Road. They had moved into the big house now, but the only civilised people, except her father, whom she had seen during

this fortnight were Mr. Weedon, who occasionally looked in to condole upon things in general—a young and very light-hearted Irish doctor—and the new manager who had come in Mr. Silkworth's place.

It was on the subject of this new manager that Marian was anxiously reflecting one morning early in March, while she took her walk before breakfast. The sunshine, though already brilliant, was not yet oppressive. The road she followed ran between two cane-fields; nothing more than a rough cart-track of yellowish earth, sunk between two banks. This had already become a favourite walk of Marian's; not only was she here fairly well protected from both sun and wind, but she had long since discovered that, however monotonous a cane-field might look at a distance, there was nothing like it for variety, when seen close. In the first place, though all the canes were alike in consistency, the attitude of each was a thing by itself. There were canes that stood as straight as arrows, their blades spread like fans; and there were canes that lay along the ground, borne down by their own weight, and even leaning over the banks like some sort of shining yellow snake that was stretching and crawling to reach the road. And there were curved canes, and twisted canes, and each one that was curved fell into a different arch, and each one was twisted in a different fashion. No, thought Marian, it was not possible to weary of looking. Were there not golden-brown canes and pale yellow canes, and even deep red canes, glowing here and there like long thin tongues of crimson flames. And, then, was ever any London lodging-house as thickly inhabited, or any London street as alive and busy, as a cane-field at this season? Take the lizards alone; hundreds of little creatures of a bright metallic green were sliding in and out between the roots, charging the bank or basking in the cart-ruts.

More than once, on coming round a corner, Marian was amused by a regular stampede of lizards, who had apparently been holding a public meeting; and now and then she got a start when things which she had taken for shadows, or sticks, suddenly quivered and scuttled across her toes.

Over the lizards' heads the humming-birds had it all to

themselves; in and out, out and in between the canes did they shoot, so desperately busy that when a rare rest was taken, on the tip of a blade which scarcely bent under the infliction, the feathered morsel seemed to look guiltily conscious of wasting its time. And yet, though teeming with life, how silent it was! Nothing but the subdued rustle of the wind among the canes—a sound as of gently-running water—and occasionally a sharp, dismal cry uttered for ever in the same note by some unknown blackbird perched upon a guava bush.

All these sights and sounds Marian already knew by heart. To-day she passed them by, almost with indifference, for it was not the lizards, but Mr. Ritchie, the new manager, who was in the foreground of her thoughts. He was very active, certainly; but had he not rather too many plans, or, at any rate, more than were good for her father's peace of mind? The Captain had now quite dropped the farce of indifference, and had thrown himself, heart and soul, into the task of turning Lot 13 into a success, and Simon's would-be vengeance into a hollow mockery. It had been a special dispensation of Providence which had led the enterprising Mr. Ritchie across his path—so he considered, but this was just what Marian doubted. All this talk about new machinery, and "vacuum pans," and a dozen other things, whose meaning was Greek to her, awoke forebodings. Where was the money to come from for all this?

Having reached the end of the cane-field, Marian stood still considering. She shrank from venturing out on to the shadeless road, and yet it was rather early for retracing her steps. A little to the right, by the side of the road, there stood a solitary hut, as usual upon four legs, and with one tattered banana waving its green arms above the thatched roof, somewhat like an aged sorcerer making cabalistic signs behind his victim's back and above its head.

The square of shade thrown by the hut looked inviting, and there was besides an overturned tub, which presented a most acceptable seat. Marian accordingly sat down, with the intention of taking a rest before turning home. In the species of

shed, that was necessarily formed by the elevated position of the hut, there were more tubs standing about, and a good many calabashes littering the ground. Between these, about half-a-dozen hens nestled in convenient nooks, having taken refuge from the sun.

Marian had been sitting for some minutes, and was thinking of beginning her return journey, when she was somewhat surprised to see the figure of a rider on the road. From where she sat the road could be seen winding away for a considerable distance, and the figure was as yet not much more than a moving dot. She had never yet seen anyone here on horseback, at this hour, and she thought she would wait and see who it could be. After another minute or two, she began to grow puzzled, and presently, to her astonishment, she recognised that this person on horseback was a lady. She was mounted on a tall and very thin steed of a bleached yellow tint, and trotting along at a more than brisk pace. The lady herself seemed likewise to have no superfluous flesh, as Marian became aware the nearer she came. She could distinguish a slight, spare figure sitting very straight in the saddle, but as for the features, they were not yet recognisable. Marian's curiosity increased tenfold. Who could she be? Since the day on which she had landed, she had seen no women except negresses and coolies. No, certainly the seat on the tub must not be abandoned until the mysterious horse-woman had drawn close.

She was still staring with all her eyes when the mistress of the hut, who was known to her by the name of Rosanna Cuffy, came lumbering down the piece of ladder which served as door-steps, and commenced making a raid upon the hens under the house.

"Me want eat chicken dinner," she explained to Marian. "Me pain stomach, chicken-broth make pain stomach get good," and she made a dash at a particular white hen whose appearance seemed more especially to tickle her palate. But the white hen had no idea of being made into broth, and, after knocking over most of the calabashes in a desperate scramble, flew cackling round the hut and towards the banana, followed

by its dusky mistress as well as by Marian, who had now joined in the chase.

"You will never catch that white hen," said Marian, after a breathless two minutes. "Take one of the others; that black one is close to your hand."

"No, thankee, Missis; what kind of broth you think miserable black nigger chicken like that be making? Me want white chicken, and, praise the Lord, I got him now—oh, Holy Saints, what that be?"

Marian was so bewildered by what followed that it took her some minutes to understand exactly what had happened. In the very moment that the black hand had been laid upon the white hen, something that looked to her eyes like a lizard magnified about twentyfold had dropped down—apparently from the skies, but more probably from either the roof or the banana—right on to the top of the hen, and had all but scuttled away with its prize, when a couple of smart blows coming from a riding-whip, and planted neatly on the head, caused it to drop the shrieking chicken and dart away like lightning among the tall grass.

All this had happened in less than a minute, and it was not until the baffled robber had disappeared that Marian looked round for the rescuer, for it was very evident that those timely blows had not come from Mrs. Cuffy's hand. The good woman had retained just enough presence of mind to possess herself of the unfortunate white hen, who appeared to be more paralysed with fear than rejoiced at its escape. The chances are that in a white hen's opinion there isn't a pin to choose between being boiled down into broth and being eaten for dinner by an iguana.

Beside Mrs. Cuffy there now stood a short wiry person in an exceedingly well-worn, and not particularly well-made, riding habit. She was very thin—almost as thin as Aunt Val, Marian told herself. In the excitement of the chicken-hunt she had forgotten the mysterious horse-woman, but she remembered her now, and to her astonishment became aware that she was old. That is to say, old according to Marian's idea of such things; and,

at any rate, there could be no doubt that her youth lay behind her.

"Oh, Miss Mercury, ma'am," groaned Rosanna Cuffy, "may Lord pour thousand blessings on head! He Himself sent you this road; you save my dinner for me, you have, indeed!"

"I call that arriving in the nick of time," said the stranger briskly, while her grey eyes danced with enjoyment. "I saw you chasing the chicken, and as I was particularly anxious to speak to this young lady, I thought the best thing I could do was to jump off the Mosquito's back, and so here I am, and here's your chicken too, let's be thankful!"

She spoke in a quick, decisive voice, and this same briskness, as well as a certain old-fashioned primness, was visible in her whole person and all her movements. Her small, neat features were sharply cut. Whether she had been comely once upon a time it was hard to say; now the skin was both deeply tanned and deeply wrinkled, and the thin wisps of neutral-tinted hair, which escaped from under her pot-hat, were mixed with grey.

"You want to speak to me?" asked Marian in surprise.

"Yes. That is to say, if you are the person I mean. I don't well see how you can help being Miss Berrincott?"

"I am called Berrincott."

"Splendid! And I am called McCrie, though the black people have turned it into Mercury. You mustn't think me unneighbourly. I should have looked in upon you long ago, only that I had a touch of fever. And now you'll take me to Lot 13, won't you, and give me a glass of lime-juice; and I'll tell you all about everything as we go along. But first I must catch the Mosquito. Here, Mosquito, where are you? Come along, there's a dear old boy!"

Marian had followed her new acquaintance on to the road, and stood by while the meagre yellow charger was coaxed to the side of its mistress, who, having passed her arm through the reins, turned to Marian.

"And now let us start. To begin with, I must tell you

that I have been just dying to see you. It's always such a treat to see anyone fresh from home."

"I hope you are not disappointed," said Marian, who was beginning to feel amused.

Miss McCrie gave her a long but not unkindly stare from out of her lively grey eyes.

"Not a bit. I don't know whether you are beautiful or not, because I have seen too few people in my life to be able to judge; but I like your face, and I have an idea that you and I are going to be friends. And now I suppose I ought to be explaining myself to you a little more. The fact is that I am a government official. You wouldn't have guessed that, would you?"

"A government official?"

"Exactly. It is the official registrar of the windward district who is speaking to you now, if you please; which means in plain English that I have to register the births, deaths, and marriages which take place on this side of the island. I have been at it for ten years now, but I haven't grown fat upon it yet, as you see."

"Are you sure that horse won't escape?" interrupted Marian. "Isn't he very restless?"

"Who? Mosquito? Never you fear. Of course he's a devil—everybody knows that; but he and I understand each other perfectly, don't we, Mosquito? Well, to resume. It's at Cane Hill that I sit with my books of registration, a few miles from here. We're nearer the hills, and a good deal higher than this. Cane Hill used to belong to my family, but we came down in the world. I was born there, and so were all my brothers and sisters, and the larger half of them died there too."

"And the others?" asked Marian timidly.

"They died in other places. I was the youngest of the eight, and now I am alone."

She was silent for about a minute, and, now that her face was in repose, Marian was struck by the expression of her mouth. It was the mouth that undoubtedly was Miss McCrie's characteristic feature, being small, very tightly closed, and

drooping almost imperceptibly at the corners. Something about the tightness seemed to suggest the battling down of some inconvenient sadness—as though its owner were trying not to cry—and contrasted strangely with the lively grey eyes.

“And your father and mother are dead also?”

“Both dead.”

“Isn’t it very lonely at Cane Hill?”

“Well, it is not as lively as it once was, but I must be thankful that the Company have left me the use of the house. It was a company, you know, that bought the estate when we were bankrupt. But you must come and see for yourself; I have got ever so many guest rooms at Cane Hill, especially since poor Walter’s death.”

“Was Walter your brother?”

“Yes, the last of them. He was paralysed for the last eight years, and I took care of him. Harry, too, ended with paralysis, and Jane and Agnes died of fever. Three of them died violent deaths. But why do you let me chatter on like this, Miss Berrincott? It is not to talk of tragedies that I came here this morning; I have got something quite different in view. Can you guess what?”

“Indeed I cannot.”

“A comedy—no, I ought rather to call it a love drama—in which you are to play a part.”

“I?”

“Yes, you. I won’t make myself out better than I am. It was not *only* to pay you a visit that I came here this morning, but also to ask a favour. The fact is that I require your services.”

“As what?”

“As a gooseberry.”

“What *can* you mean?”

“Surely you know what a gooseberry is?” and now Miss McCrie’s eyes were dancing with enjoyment. “I thought it was in England that they grew. But first I must tell you the story. Jess Collins is the daughter of a manager on a windward estate, and Mr. Philipps is manager of another; the latter

gentleman is young and good-looking, and Jess is a sweet girl, and has got delicious black eyes. Perhaps you can guess the rest for yourself. But they have few opportunities of meeting, and just now they haven't seen each other for ever so long, as they have both barely got over the fever ; and so, in order to give them a chance, I've organised a picnic. There are plenty of gentlemen to be had, but ladies are rare with us ; and, as I don't want the thing to look too barefaced, and also would prefer not to have all the gentlemen—Mr. Philipps excepted—on my hands, I have made a raid upon you. Please say you will come."

"Of course I will come. Where is the picnic to be ?"

"Wherever you like. It is supposed to be got up in your honour, you know ; so of course you can choose your own point. Jess and Mr. Philips will be just as happy on the beach as in the woods, or by the river."

"Oh, then, please let it be the woods ! I have been a fortnight here, and I don't yet know what a tree fern is like. And—and I should like to hear more about Jess."

"She is a dear little thing ; I will tell you as much as you like. But, stop a bit—I have got an idea. Instead of merely talking, would it not be much simpler if I made you acquainted ? Prospect is only six miles from here, so while I am drinking my lime-juice, you can put on your riding skirt and have your pony saddled, and I will take you straight off and introduce you to each other. I am very anxious to see Jess, at any rate, as I hear they have cut her hair, and I do hope it has not spoiled her."

Though slightly staggered, Marian acquiesced readily enough ; and the house being reached, and no attendant spirit forthcoming, Miss McCrie proceeded to saddle and bridle a mule in the same neat, prim manner that she did everything else, helped Marian into her seat, scrambled on to the back of the snorting and prancing Mosquito, and turned its pale yellow head in the direction of Prospect.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JESS.

ON the way to Prospect Marian learnt a few more details about the Collins family. Prospect was not their home, but an empty house near the sea, where they had gone for change of air while recovering from the fever, for they had pretty near all of them had it. Mr. Collins rode over at night when he could get away from the works ; but his employers would not allow him to sleep off the estate. Poor man ! he had a hard time of it, with eleven children and eighty pounds a year.

Marian listened, somewhat aghast, and her sympathy for Jess increased. She was yet more aghast, as well as strangely touched, when they reached " the empty house near the sea." The rooms were only half furnished, and the whole place had a sort of scrambly look about it, for it had not been thought worth while to make oneself comfortable for such a short time. The children ran about with close-cropped hair and thin sharp faces, and without a shade of pink in all their poor little cheeks. It was a pitiable and yet a glad sight ; for, although they had all been in danger, they were all saved, and, though death's bony hand had been very near closing over these small blossoms, yet it had passed on without plucking one—this time. On the tables, and even on the window-sills, spoons and glasses were standing about—remains of strengthening drinks or cups of soup which the various small convalescents had to take at various hours. And all the time the mother's patient brown eyes watched them out of a haggard leather face. She looked like a woman who has borne a good deal, but who is ready to bear more.

" Matters are not so bad," she said, in answer to Miss McCrie's enquiries. " Charlie had only two fits of coughing in the night, and Hannah has only turned faint once since yesterday ; I think they are improving." And then she fell again to watching her children, and left the talk to Miss

McCrie. At the mention of the projected picnic her haggard face had lighted up wonderfully. The faintest ray of comfort was enough to cheer her, and here she foresaw something good for Jess. The only question was whether the doctor would allow her to go.

"I'll settle it with the doctor," said Miss McCrie. "Jess will be stronger by next week, and besides we will take care of her, and we must see and get her a good steady mule that will not shake her. By-the-bye, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Philipps has got just the very animal we want, and I daresay he wouldn't mind lending it to her."

Miss McCrie considered this to be a masterpiece of diplomacy, and, though she looked as demure as she could while uttering it, she could not quite succeed in keeping her eyes grave.

Jess's white cheeks had suddenly turned faintly pink—only for a minute, it is true, but for that minute it greatly improved her. Marian had decided from the first that if Jess was well she would certainly be pretty, and now she saw that she was right. While the elders talked, the two girls had been making acquaintance. Jess was not shy, but sat gazing at her visitor with awestruck and admiring eyes. The boyishly short hair made her face look still thinner than it was.

"Jess," said her mother's voice presently, "it is time for you to be taking your drops"—and Jess rose with something of a sigh.

"May I go with you?" asked Marian, noticing the sigh.

Jess's face brightened instantly.

"Please do. They are in the other room."

After the drops had been taken, Jess showed no inclination to go back to the so-called sitting-room. She looked at Marian tentatively, and then asked her whether she would like to see the garden. Marian had no objection to seeing the garden, though, to be sure, it was hotter outside than in; and Jess, with her trailing convalescent's step, led the way out of doors.

There was remarkably little to see about the garden, as

Marian immediately perceived ; some weed-grown walks, the remains of a few flower-beds, and beside the door-step a tree of purple-wreath which had done blossoming. A few stiff bunches still sat on the tree, but the sun had scorched them almost to white, and the slightest touch was enough to make them drop off with such alacrity that they seemed to have been only waiting for the chance. Was it to show her this that Jess had brought her out here ?

"We are close to the beach here," said Jess, moving towards the end of the garden. "Look, the water is straight below us."

They stood now leaning over the low wall, and looking down to where long bright creepers stretched over the beach like huge green characters scrawled on the black sand.

"Have you been in this house for long ?" asked Marian.

As Jess gave no answer, she looked up and found two black eyes fixed on her face, with something of an imploring look.

"Oh, Miss Berrincott—that is your name, is it not ?—I should like to ask you something. You heard what Miss McCrie said about the mule for the picnic. Please tell me whether I looked very foolish at the moment. You didn't notice anything, did you ?"

Marian was embarrassed. She could not truthfully say that she had noticed nothing, for there was no doubt that Jess had blushed at the mention of that steady animal.

"I think you looked glad," she said, after a moment's deliberation.

"I *was* glad, so I couldn't help looking it. Don't you always look exactly as you feel ?"

Marian deliberated again.

"No, I don't think so. I think I prefer generally not to let people guess what I feel."

"How strange ! That's an idea that never would have occurred to me. Why should one hide one's feelings, unless, of course, one had wicked ones ? What makes you do that, I wonder ?"

"I have never thought about it. I just do it because it comes naturally."

Jess seemed not to be listening now ; she was picking nervously at the weeds on the top of the wall.

"There is something else I wanted to ask you. Miss McCrie has told you all about the picnic ; did she—did she say for certain that the gentleman who is to lend me the mule will be there himself ?"

"Yes, she said that Mr. Philipps is going to be there."

"A—h!" and a great breath of relief was drawn. "That makes me happy ! You mustn't think me very queer, please ; but, there, I can't keep it to myself, and you have got such a good face, I think I should like to tell you about it."

"But you needn't tell me about it," said Marian, almost frightened.

"Do you mean that you have guessed already ?"

"Oh, no—that is to say it doesn't matter what I have guessed. But please don't think that I expect you to tell me anything."

"I know you don't, but I have no one to talk to, you see, for poor mother has no time to listen to me ; and I can't tell you how unhappy I have been all these weeks, knowing that he, too, had the fever. It was that that made me feel quite certain that I was fond of him. • Do you think it can be wrong to be fond of a man before you are quite certain that he is fond of you ?"

"No," said Marian thoughtfully, "I don't think that can be wrong exactly."

"Oh, thank you. Then may I talk to you ?"

Again the black eyes hung on Marian's face, and again the white cheeks had turned pink. From the moment she had heard from Miss McCrie that the unknown Jess was "fond" of somebody, Marian's heart had for some mysterious reason warmed towards her. It was no want of sympathy which had made her attempt to avert the impending confidences, rather it was an excess of sympathy. She could not help fancying that Jess was speaking on a mere impulse, and that by to-

morrow, perhaps, she might regret what she had said. She knew how painful such a feeling would be to herself. And yet she could not resist the black eyes.

"Of course," she said hesitatingly, "you may talk to me if you like."

And then Jess began to talk, pouring out the whole of her poor, over-taxed little heart, which had obviously been filled to bursting with the image of Mr. Philipps; but doing it with so pure and childlike a simplicity that this unlooked-for general confession, instead of being either offensive or ridiculous, turned out to be the most natural thing in the world. Even Marian understood this, and very soon had given up all attempt to stem the flood of confidences. While she stood by, silent and embarrassed, wishing to express the sympathy which she most truly felt, and not knowing how, the thought even crossed her mind whether it were not better to be made like Jess, rather than like herself; whether it was not honester and more natural to show one's feelings openly—"unless, of course, one had wicked ones," as Jess said—instead of instinctively concealing them; and whether, too, it must not be an unspeakable relief to be rid of a secret that has been dragging at one's heart-strings for months and months past.

Fortunately, Jess did not expect many words; Marian's face seemed to suffice to her.

"There is something in it which gave me confidence from the first moment," she exclaimed. "I felt sure you would understand me. Perhaps," she added, as though struck by an idea, "you have gone through the same thing yourself?"

"I? Oh no, never!" said Marian hurriedly, and turning scarlet as she spoke.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, quite sure! What can have made you think of such a thing? And—and, if you please, I think I should like to go back into the house."

Jess said nothing, but she scarcely looked convinced as she led the way back.

Marian followed her, holding up her riding-skirt and

breathing rather quick. She did not feel satisfied with herself. Certainly there could be no doubt that she was not made like Jess.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FEVER PATIENTS.

"It is sure to hold out till to-night," said Mr. Rudd, decisively.

"I am glad you think so," replied Mr. Weedon, with his heart-rending smile.

"I don't care twopence whether it does or not. In my opinion there isn't much to choose between being roasted or boiled."

The last speaker was Mr. Brooke who, not having been able to get clear of St. Clare as soon as he had hoped, had consented, though with a very bad grace, to take part in the picnic.

"But only under condition that you don't point things out to me," had been the stipulation he made. "I warn you that I'll keep my eyes tight shut all the time; for as to looking at so-called wonders, I've simply struck work."

And now the day had come, and the larger half of the party was wending its way through the cane-fields to the place of *rendezvous*. Marian had scarcely slept all night, out of sheer terror lest it might rain. Jess's little romance was the very first in which she had been called upon to play a part, even though only the passive part of a gooseberry, and the idea that Miss McCrie's charitable plans might yet be crossed was not to be borne with any calmness. The matter had looked very critical for a moment. There had been one heavy shower already, but so short and followed by so brilliant a sunshine, that it was hard to believe in its not having been a dream. Then, at the last moment, there had been another *contretemps*. Her father, who had been persuaded to join the party, and who was already in the saddle, had all

but dismounted again because of a clamouring Coolie, who had chosen this moment for coming and demanding justice for some supposed injury. It was an intricate tale, which even in plain English might have been hard to follow, but which in Coolie English was all but unintelligible. A mule with a bad leg—another Coolie over at White Village—something that this other Coolie had done to the mule—such were the chief headings of the story, the upshot of which was that the master was earnestly called upon to ride over to White Village and punish the criminal.

"I must inquire into this matter," the Captain had declared, and already he had had one foot out of the stirrup, when the united remonstrances of the three gentlemen had succeeded in dissuading him from his purpose.

"Well, well, it can stand over till to-morrow," he decided. "All right, Ladai, I'll ride over to White Village to-morrow, and see about that mule."

"I should advise you not to go alone if you are going in the character of avenging angel," said Mr. Brooke, discontentedly; "avenging angels are apt to have a deuce of a time of it in this beastly country."

The Captain laughed quite heartily. "Thank you, Mr. Brooke; but I fancy I have faced more formidable foes in my day than these impassible Indians."

"Wait till you have seen these impassible Indians in a rage," said Mr. Weedon. "Mr. Brooke is right. You had better take a couple of good stout blacks with you, or else you may have the devil to pay,—and I don't think the mule with the bad leg is worth that."

Mr. Rudd said nothing, but after they had fairly started he brought his horse alongside of Marian's mule.

"Has your father got a revolver, Miss Berrincott?" he inquired. "For, if not, I could lend him one."

"Do you think he will want it?" she asked, a little startled.

"Well, I think he ought certainly to take it with him on this expedition to-morrow. White Village is really no village at all, but a big Coolie settlement, and it lies somewhat

isolated, so that if he should get into anything of a dispute with the people he would certainly be at a great disadvantage."

This warning had been given at the beginning of the ride, and though it had sunk deep into Marian's mind, was, for the present, soon forgotten in the more pressing excitement of the moment.

In front of the windmill which served as a place of *rendezvous*—another deserted windmill, as Mr. Weedon took the opportunity of pointing out—the rest of the party were assembled and waiting. There was Miss McCrie upon the Mosquito's yellow back; there was Jess upon that steady animal, of whom Marian had already heard so much, and looking rather shy and very happy, while listening to the words of a young man, in a white sun-helmet and with a fair moustache, who had blue shades under his eyes which exactly matched those under Jess's own eyes, and who, therefore, could be no other than the second convalescent, Mr. Philipps. Then there was the light-hearted young Irish doctor whom Marian knew already, and whom Miss McCrie had evidently let into the plot. Another doctor who had been neither young nor Irish, nor light-hearted, might very likely have put a stern veto upon this day's excursion; but fortunately Doctor O'Lynn knew what it was to have a susceptible heart, so he stretched a point—or rather two—and both convalescents had been allowed to go, nothing but wraps and umbrellas being stipulated for.

There was a fourth person waiting in front of the windmill whom Marian did not immediately know how to account for—a long, lean figure, mounted on much too small a horse, seeing that his legs almost touched the ground. Marian's first impulse was to laugh, and in the same moment she recognised Mr. Hibbert.

"Quite an unlooked-for addition to our party," Miss McCrie explained; "I had no idea Mr. Hibbert was over here on business. And he tells me, too, that you are acquainted."

"Were acquainted," corrected Mr. Hibbert, bringing his pony close up to Marian.

"But I have been told that travelling acquaintances count only for the time being."

"Not with me," said Marian, holding out her hand a little shyly; "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Hibbert."

"Then are you quite sure you don't object to my being of the party?" The question was put in a somewhat lower voice.

She looked at him in surprise. "I don't understand. What could make me object?"

"Various reasons could. I will tell you one of them later on, if you like, when we have a moment's quiet. In the meantime I think we are off."

And so they were, with Miss McCrie at the head, and the rest of the party following in a straggling line along the rough road. The Mosquito's legs being long and his pace a brisk one, most of the other quadrupeds were forced to break into a canter in order to keep up with him; and as, in spite of the steadiness of her mule, it soon appeared that cantering was apt to give Jess a stitch in the side, the natural result was that she lagged behind, and as of course she couldn't be left to herself, Mr. Philipps likewise took to lagging. Marian was glad and provoked, all at once; glad that matters were taking the right turn, and provoked because she would have liked so dreadfully to see what a man looked like when he was talking to a girl whom he was fond of, and what sort of a face the girl made while listening.

But soon she began to forget her disappointment in the growing interest of the surroundings. Their way led at first by the side of a river, which, seen from a distance, looked like a band of vivid green winding through the parched land. All the bushes and grass that grew far and wide seemed to have crowded to the water's edge, as though thirsty for the precious moisture. Here and there the crimson spike of the river-cane made a bold splash of colour in the midst of the fifty shades of green. Islands covered with tall, thriving reeds, sometimes with a prickly gru-gru palm as centre-piece stood out boldly in the midst of the current, overspun with a thick growth of sea-side grape and bordered with huge

drooping leaves that flapped over the edge and trailed in the water.

But it was not until she had seen a palmiste towering eighty feet high, and a patch of ground enamelled with begonia, and a hill-side covered with bamboo, and a hundred other wonderful things, that Marian began to understand that as yet she knew nothing of the tropics. She had had dreams and visions of what she was going to see, but not in any one of them had anything figured that was quite as beautiful as this bamboo. From a distance she had not immediately understood what it was ; it had required Mr. Hibbert to enlighten her. Indeed, how could any outsider guess at the real substance and correct designation of these huge waves of green froth, so airily tossed by the wind ? As she drew a little nearer the froth seemed to turn into plumes which grew alive at each puff of air, and this again, as she drew nearer yet, into a flutter as of millions of tiny green wings, which quickened and slackened but never entirely ceased. It was not until she was close by the bamboo grove, that she would distinguish the highly polished stems, as of smooth, green ivory.

At the foot of the mountains a halt was made. Here the steeds were to be consigned to the black attendants and a convenient spot for picnicking to be sought on foot, for by this time all trace of a path had ceased, and the footing was none too sure, even for a mule.

And now Marian discovered that she had made a mistake when she had fancied that there could be nothing more beautiful in the world than bamboo. She had forgotten that the world also contained such things as tree-ferns. More beautiful ? Well, it was hard to say, being entirely a matter of taste, or rather a question as to whether one prefers plumes or lace.

It was under this very roof of green lace that the shawls were spread, the baskets unpacked and shady hats laid aside. To venture further would have meant not only a steep climb, but would have required the services of ever so many cutlasses, was explained to Marian. Marian made no objection. There was a pleasing and restful sameness about this tree-fern glade to which she yielded herself with gladness—green arches,

green curtains, glimpses of green galleries winding away out of sight, supported by golden-brown pillars and echoing to the music of water that was still fresh from the hills.

Meanwhile, plates and tongues were rattling cheerily around her. Both convalescents being still on strict diet, it had been found more convenient to make them sit side by side—it simplified matters about helping, as Miss McCrie explained. By this time this kind-hearted lady's plot had become an open secret. Not only did every single member of the party know that he was acting the part of a gooseberry, but also it must be confessed that the greater part of the gooseberries behaved in a manner that was well-nigh outrageous; Mr. Brooke, although painfully heated by his ride, recovering himself sufficiently to vie with Doctor O'Lynn in the making of wretched jokes in which such things as spoons and fever patients and hot and cold fits largely figured; and even Mr. Weedon and the Captain waking up sufficiently to the point of the situation, the former to smile, the latter to chuckle whenever one of these inferior arrows hit the mark.

And certainly it required no doctor to discern the symptoms of fever here, though even a doctor might have found it hard to give the malady its right name. The burning flush that came and went so quickly, the heavy languor of the glance—did they belong to the old fever that was but barely shaken off, or to a new fever which was only waxing towards the crisis?

The patients themselves cared nothing, just as little as they cared for the puns that flew around them, having reached that stage—happy mortals!—in which a desert place really has no advantages over a crowded spot, seeing that other people have ceased counting.

Mr. Rudd, however, had other things to think of besides playing gooseberry, as was shown by the "Williamstown Trumpet" which presently emerged from out of his pocket. But there were no listeners to be had. Doctor O'Lynn was talking to Miss McCrie; Mr. Brooke was struggling to put into shape a joke about a medicine-spoon, tantalising visions of which floated before his mind's eye; and Mr. Weedon had

suddenly remembered that he had left something in his saddle-pocket. It was a way which Mr. Rudd's friends had, that of suddenly remembering things whenever the "Williamstown Trumpet" made its appearance.

"No, thanks, Rudd," said Mr. Brooke, waking from his reverie, and having given up the joke about the medicine-spoon as a bad job; "no more of that for *me*. No, thanks, Miss McCrie, no dessert either for me—have had enough of that too. Give me a good honest English apple and I'll tell another tale, but as for your fruit, all the difference I can discover between them is that some of them taste like pomade flavoured with soap, and others like soap flavoured with pomade."

A chorus of laughing protestations arose, and by the time these had subsided Mr. Rudd had succeeded in securing the Captain as a listener.

Marian looked furtively around her; everybody's attention seemed occupied—Mr. Hibbert was helping Miss McCrie to a slice of pineapple; Mr. Brooke was talking to Doctor O'Lynn; the fever-patients were of course quite absorbed. Surely this was the moment that she had been looking for? Now that she was rested from the first fatigues of the day, she felt certain that she could not be satisfied with what she had seen. The longer she sat and gazed the more surely and the more stealthily did the fever of seeing more take possession of her.

Just now it was not likely that her absence would be noticed. With another furtive glance around her Marian rose softly from her seat on the ground, and, gathering her riding-skirt about her, slunk away with the stealthy step of a criminal over the thick tangled grasses and towards the inner depths of the forest.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "BONY JOHNNIE."

FOR the first few minutes after she had effected her escape, Marian had no time to look about her, partly because of her dread of being followed, and partly because it took all her breath, and almost all her strength, to struggle up the steep hill-side.

What Miss McCrie had said about the necessity of a cutlass soon proved itself to be a bitter truth. Marian required her eyes, not to see what was around her, but simply to look where she was stepping, lest she should put her foot into some black hole, or run her forehead against a low hanging branch, or catch her riding-skirt upon a prickly green arm, or be entangled bodily in a network of green threads.

After climbing for some minutes she reached a comparatively flat and comparatively open spot, and, thinking herself safe from pursuit, stood still at last with heated cheeks and hair all ruffled, battling for breath. Her first impression was more of fear than of admiration. Everything around her looked so big, so hugely and unfamiliarly large, that, with something of the awe of a child that has ventured into a strange room by itself, she almost regretted having come here alone.

Surely she must have shrunk to half her size, she told herself while gazing up the glossy stem of the pillar beside her. At her feet there lay the single leaf of some, to her, unknown plant, which would have been large enough to wrap her up from top to toe, and close beside her there dangled a green pod that would have served splendidly as a cap. Of nothing so much did the magnificent tangle around her remind Marian as of a hot-house escaped and run wild—a giant's hot-house, of course. So dense was the crowd, and so eager the life among these rioting rebels, that the space they had at their disposal was obviously far too little for their wants. So savagely did they struggle for standing room that each tree seemed to be

holding its neighbour by the throat, and to be held by it. Not a morsel of sky was visible from here, for whatever loopholes there might otherwise have been were closed with curtains of creepers.

Down there by the edge of the wood there had still been breeze enough to flutter the corners of the napkins and to make the little curls dance all over Jess's black head; but here it was absolutely still, although not quite silent. Now that she had no longer her own laboured breath in her ears Marian became aware of sounds that were quite distinct from the hum of the insects—mysterious sounds of groaning and hammering and striking, which, heard in the depth of this green gloom, scarcely sounded quite earthly.

Again she wished that she had not come here alone. It took her some minutes to realise that nothing more ghostly than the trees were responsible for these noises. Standing so closely packed and with their heads at the mercy of the never-ceasing wind, they had no choice but to grind out this melancholy music upon each other's stems and boughs and twigs.

It was a comfort to have the point settled, and yet Marian did not know whether she was to be glad or sorry, provoked or relieved, when by certain other—and this time distinctly human—sounds she became aware that her escape had, after all, not been quite so perfect as she had supposed, and that she was being followed. A great deal depended, of course, upon who was following her: Mr. Weedon would be a distinct bore, and so would Doctor O'Lynn, because of his eternal jokes. Mr. Rudd would not be so very objectionable. Ah! no; it was none of these, as she now perceived: it was Mr. Hibbert. Well, he would, on the whole, do better than any, because he talked so little and would not expect her to talk. Accordingly Marian stepped forward, pushing aside the curtain of creepers which half concealed her.

"It is me you are looking for, is it not?" she called out, for Mr. Hibbert had made a halt and was peering about him with anxious eyes.

"It is you; and you can thank your stars, Miss Berrincott,

that I noticed your absence early enough to get on to your track. A night spent in the forest is not a thing to be recommended."

"I don't think I should have lost my way; and, even if I had, what could have happened to me? There are no wild beasts here."

"All sorts of things could have happened to you; even if you had not been knocked over by a falling palm—and these trees have got so little room for their roots that there are a good many falls—you would most undoubtedly have got the fever."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am glad you have come. But must we go back immediately?" she added, looking about her for the fiftieth time.

This might easily have been the trick of a finished coquette. Mr. Hibbert, who was standing beside Marian, brushing morsels of leaves and twigs from his elbows and knees, gave her a look of astonished inquiry, in which something of gladness shone. But the candour of the gaze which met his was not to be mistaken.

"There is no hurry about going back, unless you wish it," he said quietly. "No one was even thinking of packing the baskets when I came away."

"Then please let us stay a little longer; I have not quite done staring about me."

"Very well, but I think we had better stay where we are; to go further would scarcely be prudent. Here is a log that makes a decent seat."

They sat down upon the fallen trunk and for several minutes all was perfect silence, except for the creaking and hammering of the tree branches far over-head. Marian was enjoying herself immensely when her day-dream was broken in upon by Mr. Hibbert's voice.

"Miss Berrincott!"

"Yes?" she said, with something of a start.

"Do you remember my telling you this morning that there were very various reasons which might make you object to my being of the party?"

"Yes, you said something of the sort."

"I said that if we had a quiet moment I would tell you what one of those reasons was. Well, it strikes me that this is a quiet moment."

"He is going to confide in me," said Marian to herself. "I wish, oh, how I wish he wouldn't! I wonder why people always will confide in me when I never do in them!"

"Well, to come to the point at once, the objection which I thought you might have, was that of being conspicuous."

"Why should your being of the party make me conspicuous?"

"Because I am myself conspicuous, wretchedly and hopelessly conspicuous; and because naturally anyone in whose company I am shares to some extent in that gift of catching the eye, with which I am so largely blest."

Marian sat still in embarrassed silence, racking her brain for some remark that would be both civil and truthful. At last she thought she had found what she wanted.

"It certainly must be a great nuisance to be always stared at."

To her astonishment, this harmless remark roused the usually so quiet Mr. Hibbert in a quite unexpected manner.

"A nuisance? Good gracious, child, you don't know what you are talking about! It isn't a nuisance, it's a misfortune, as great a misfortune as being hunchbacked or blind, or——"

"But, Mr. Hibbert."

"Yes, yes, I know what you would say. I have got all my limbs straight and strong, and should thank God for it. You think within yourself: 'This man has got all his five senses perfect, of what does he complain?' But does it ever occur to you to think what it means not to be able to move without having all the eyes around upon you, nor to cross a street without people stopping to stare as at a show, nor to enter a picture-gallery or a concert-room without guessing at half-suppressed smiles around you, and seeing the women nudging their husbands or their sisters, and asking who that funny-looking creature is? And all this, mind, for a man who is of 'a shy and retiring disposition,' as the three-volume novels

have it. It is no use ; no one can understand what I mean who has not himself been haunted all his life by the spectre of conspicuousness."

"But, Mr. Hibbert," ventured Marian, a good deal startled, "surely you are making things out worse than they are."

"I don't think I am; not worse than they are to *me*. Of course I know that I am not the only lanky and lantern-jawed fellow in the world, but, as a general rule, Providence improves matters by putting a more sturdy spirit into those unfortunate shapes. In my case there has been some blunder ; the sensitiveness of a mimosa within the form of a broomstick can surely not be the right combination. I tell you that the hunchback and the blind have got a far better time of it. Their sufferings are patent to everybody ; wherever they go they meet with sympathy and pity, whereas nobody thinks of spending upon the man who is a walking caricature more than a smile of amusement, unless it is found worth while to make a joke. Nobody is sorry for the wretch."

"*I am sorry for you,*" said Marian on some impulse.

He looked at her eagerly, but the same instant his expression changed.

"I don't want your pity," he said shortly, then, without another word, stood up and walked some paces off to where the withered branch of a palm dangled downwards, caught among the creepers. This he began to tear into strips, keeping his back turned to Marian, while he diligently worked away.

Marian had been wondering for some minutes what was going to happen next, when somewhere higher up on the mountain-slope there was a sharp sound, or rather a series of sharp sounds, as of several shots going off in rapid succession, followed by a few seconds of silence and then by a crash almost close at hand.

"What was that ?" she asked, starting to her feet.

"Only another palm down. Don't be alarmed ; what you took for musketry was nothing but the snapping of the roots, and the crash was only the poor doomed creature, landing headlong among its fellows. There it will stick till Dooms-

day, fast locked in their arms. Well, anyway it's another pole for the creepers."

Mr. Hibbert was again standing beside Marian.

"Miss Berrincott," he said with a change of tone, "I want you to forgive me; I did not mean to be rude, but I am rather in a bad way to-day. There is something else that I want to ask you. I know that my way of talking must often strike you as peculiar, and I should not like you to misunderstand me completely. I think that if you knew the history of one episode in my life, various things would become clear to you. I have never been able to make up my mind as to whether I am the hero of a tragedy or a comedy. Perhaps you can help me to decide the point. May I tell you the history of that episode?"

It was almost the same question that Jess had put to her last week. But Marian answered it differently this time; for she was already deeply repenting having been so cruel as to wish that this poor man should not confide in her.

"Of course you may tell it to me, Mr. Hibbert."

"Thanks for your charity. Shall we sit down again? You can go on staring about you as I talk, you know, and I shall put it into the smallest nutshell I can. Let me first premise that my parents both died before I was six years old, and that I was brought up by a not particularly loving aunt, among a nursery-full of little cousins, who happened to be the very ideals of round little dumplings, so that by contrast with their plumpness the peculiarities with the 'bony Johnnie,' as they called me—not the 'bonnie Johnnie' mind, that would be another article altogether—were set off to the greatest possible advantage. After the trials of the nursery came the trials of the school—worse trials, of course, since the more there was of me, the more laughable did I become—until at last at the age of twenty, I was turned loose upon the world, and the social trials began, which were the worst of all.

"I was twenty-four when the episode took place of which I want to tell you. Returning from India after four years' absence, I was indulging in a highland trip, when one day as

I strode along the street of a little sea-side town I had the misfortune to attract the attention of some young gentlemen in the gutter. The next minute I had a train of followers at my heels, and amidst shouts of laughter and cries of 'Hoot ! the telegraph post's got awa' !—The man from the show's takin' an airin' !' I was pursued down the street. It so happened that several of my cousins—whom I had not seen since my return—were likewise taking a highland trip, and were likewise in the place that day. When my cousin Phil heard the shouts, he stuck his head out of the window of the inn where they were lunching, and said, 'That can be nobody else but the "bony Johnnie."' And sure enough it *was* the 'bony Johnnie.' I was captured and brought back, and at the inn I found not only Phil and Harry, but also my cousin Daisy, who had grown up since I had gone out to India. Daisy had been almost the roundest of all the little dumplings in the nursery, and she had always been the kindest to me. When the others teased me, she used to pat my cheek with her little dimpled hand, and whisper, 'Never mind, bony Johnnie ; when we are both big, I'll marry you.' We were both big now, there could be no mistake about that, and Daisy's heart had remained as tender as it had been in the nursery. All the others found the street-boy episode to have been vastly amusing ; she alone was indignant, because she alone seemed to guess what I must feel. In no other eyes but hers did I read true sympathy for my troubles. Whether it was my gratitude for this sympathy which aloneworked the mischief, or whether other causes were also at fault, I cannot say. For besides a tender heart, Daisy had also very blue eyes, and exquisitely flaxen hair. She had, in fact, developed into a remarkably pretty girl, with nothing to recall the little dumpling of the nursery except the roundness of her cheeks and the dimples on her hands. Whatever the cause may have been, it is quite certain that when I went home that night I was not heart-whole.

"And now events followed very rapidly on each other. I lost no opportunity of meeting Daisy, and very soon we were almost back again on the old nursery footing. During the

whole of our intercourse Daisy maintained the same attitude she had adopted that first day in the inn. She seemed determined to stand by me, and to make me understand that to her there was nothing ridiculous in my appearance. This gave me courage; and a fortnight after we had met again, I asked her whether she remembered saying that she would marry the 'bony Johnnie,' when we were both big? Daisy remembered, and on the very next day our engagement was proclaimed to our friends.

"And now it was that Jim appeared on the scene. Probably you are thinking to yourself that Jim was my rival? Not a bit of it; Jim had a Daisy of his own, and Daisy herself—I am convinced of it—cared at that time for nobody more than she did for me. Jim was a cheery, noisy fellow, who, as bad or good luck would have it, possessed a remarkably ready pencil and a singular aptitude for turning out caricatures. He had lived for some years abroad and had been engaged on the staff of the *Fliegende Blätter*. It was therefore not to be wondered at if instinctively he was for ever on the look-out for 'subjects.' Towards the end of my leave both Daisy and I were staying on a long visit with friends in the country. The house was full, and Jim was one of the guests. It was that ready pencil of his that did the harm, but not in malice,—oh dear, no,—rather it was with the frankest of smiles on his lips, and the most good-natured laugh in the world that he made an end of my happiness. Naturally I was too good a subject to be passed over, and Jim himself would bring me the drawings for approval, and I laughed over them, sometimes almost heartily, for they were inimitable productions, and my sense of humour was keen. Besides, I knew enough already to know that to show annoyance would only increase the absurdity of my position tenfold. I don't remember the details very distinctly, but I know that in one drawing I figured as a broomstick and in another as an hour-glass. If I don't mistake, I fancy, too, that I was a particularly brilliant success as a may-pole. Daisy, though she didn't even pretend to be amused at the caricatures, still held on stoutly, and seemed determined to brave out her position as the bride of a universal laughing-

stock. Before others she was almost ostentatiously affectionate in her manner towards me, but when we were alone it would sometimes strike me that she was more reserved than necessary and at moments absolutely thoughtful. But I would not acknowledge this to myself, just as little as I would admit that I saw her wince when the broomstick or the maypole were being passed from hand to hand amidst the most harmless laughter.

"The crisis did not come till one day when we all paid a visit to a travelling menagerie that had made a halt in the neighbourhood. We were a merry party, being mostly composed of young people. All the ladies were in the best of spirits as well as in their best clothes. I particularly remember the hat that Daisy wore. It was one that she had got from London only the day before, of a round and rather deep shade which I believe used to be called a 'mushroom-hat,' and trimmed with field-flowers. I had heard a good deal of this hat beforehand, for Daisy had been anxiously expecting it. There could be no doubt that her little round face looked ravishing under the deep straw brim, and Daisy herself seemed to be aware of this, for she too was in the best of spirits during the whole time that we were inspecting the lion and the tiger and the elephant, and lingering round the giraffe, which was the pride of the establishment.

"That evening, as I was on my way down to dinner, I was met by Daisy coming up the staircase, already dressed in her white evening dress. Her face was almost as white as her dress, and without saying a word she held towards me a piece of paper. I took it from her and beheld a half-finished sketch of a horribly lean giraffe in knickerbockers (I had been imprudent enough to appear in knickerbockers that afternoon) politely escorting a delightfully plump partridge that clung lovingly to its arm. 'Fragment of a modern menu,' was scribbled below in Jim's handwriting. And further: '*Entrées: Perdrix aux Champignons. Rôts: Giraffe à la Knickerbockère.*' Unfinished though the sketch was I immediately recognised my own features in those of the giraffe, and the partridge—was it possible? In spite of myself, I had

almost begun to laugh, when, looking up, I read the answer on Daisy's face. As soon as she was able to speak, she said, just above her breath: 'This is your fault. It could never have happened to me except for you. This is the end of everything between us. I cannot go through life chained to a scare-crow. And my hat too—it's too bad!' She snatched the paper from my hand, tore it in two, and, without another word, left me standing alone on the staircase.

"It appeared afterwards that Jim, though rendered bold by his successes, had not been quite bold enough to show Daisy her portrait. He had dropped his portfolio on the way downstairs, and she had helped him to pick up the contents. It was thus that it had come about.

"Next morning Daisy left the house, and two days later I got a long and penitent letter from her. Not that she regretted her decision, but only the words in which it had been clothed. In this letter she begged my pardon for the mistake she had made. 'I thought I could do it,' she wrote, 'but I find I cannot. I was fond of you, Johnnie,' she further wrote, 'I am fond of you still, but I simply *cannot* stand being made ridiculous; and beside you I should always be ridiculous. You have every quality I should want in a husband; you are good, you are brave, you are high-minded, but you are—what shall I call it?—too *baroque* ever to be taken quite seriously.'

"At the expiration of my leave I returned to India. It was only by degrees, as I calmed down, that I began to understand how it had all come about. Daisy was not heartless; she was, on the contrary, a good little girl, with some fibre of pity in her nature which pushed her instinctively to take the part of the oppressed. Our meeting in the Scotch inn had fired her enthusiasm; but enthusiasm cannot last for ever, and the defiant attitude she had adopted towards the world in general could not fail to lose its charm. Of course the fragment of the modern *menu* had been the last drop in the bucket. It is possible, though barely possible, that she might have forgiven the insult to herself, but I do not think she ever could have forgiven the insult to her hat. I am not sure that I know of

any woman who would have done so. And really it was too bad to have turned that beautiful, brand-new hat into the semblance of a stewed mushroom!

"It was dating from this chapter in my history that I began to shun my fellow creatures. Now and again I believe I might have made a real friend, but I have grown suspicious and always missed the chance. I could not forget Daisy having said that it was impossible to take me seriously. It was this feeling that brought me to where I now am. To be District Magistrate at Cassacon is almost as good as being a hermit. I believe that Daisy consoled herself by throwing herself heart and soul into the cause of the African niggers. I suppose she found what she wanted, for she has been married to a missionary these twelve years past."

Mr. Hibbert was silent for a minute before turning to Marian.

"And now, Miss Berrincott," he asked, with a quaint smile upon his lips, "perhaps you can help me to settle the point between the tragedy and the screaming farce?"

Marian did not immediately answer. She had long ago given up looking about her and had been listening with all her might. Her hands were folded in her lap and her lips parted in breathless attention. Interest, indignation, and pity all struggled for the upper-hand. When Mr. Hibbert turned towards her, her first instinct was to repress them all. But immediately upon this feeling there followed the question: "How would Jess behave in my place? I don't think she could feel more sorry for him than I do, but she would let him see that she was sorry, and that would do him good." And after all, she further told herself, if ever she was to become a little more like Jess she must begin some time or other; and was not this the best possible opportunity for an experiment, seeing that Mr. Hibbert was a sedate, elderly person, and not a foolish young man, for instance?

"Mr. Hibbert," she said, a little awkwardly, and drawing a deep breath, "I—I should like to tell you how sorry I am, but, somehow I can't." She looked straight into his face, and to his astonishment he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Miss Berrincott ! I didn't mean to distress you ; you have told me already more than I need to know."

"No, no ! I have not told you enough yet, I must tell you more. I want to tell you that I think everything and everybody has been very cruel to you. And, oh, Mr. Hibbert," went on Marian, gaining courage as she proceeded, for, after all, the thing was not nearly so difficult as it looked ; "as for Daisy, I am simply furious with her ; I think she was just a— a *wretch*."

"That is too hard upon her, Miss Berrincott."

"No, no, it isn't ; it is no use your defending her. I know that if ever I cared for anybody in that way I should stick to him through thick and thin, and of course the more he had to bear the more he would need me. The idea of not being able to hold out against a sketch ! Why, don't you see that it simply means that Daisy cared for herself and for her ridiculous hat more than for you ? If I had been Daisy——"

Marion broke off in some slight alarm at herself. Were not her feelings of true sympathy, so newly let loose, carrying her a little too far ? Most likely it would require almost as much practice to learn how to express one's sentiments as how to repress them.

Mr. Hibbert looked at her with questioning, incredulous eyes. Well would it have been for him if one of the beetles that hummed past his ear had whispered into it, that these words were not to be taken for more than they were worth. But his own narrative had excited him, and Marion with her ruffled brown hair and blue eyes on fire, was looking very lovely, and the magic of the forest worked its part, no doubt, so that between all these causes it came about that hope was at this hour born in John Hibbert's heart. A very faint and very doubtful hope, and yet as different from the despair that had accompanied him till now as daylight is from darkness or life from death.

"Is there not some new noise among the branches ?" asked Marian as Mr. Hibbert did not speak.

They both lent ear for a moment ; and, sure enough, up there among the leaves, there was something like a soft pat-

tering, and, now that they came to look about them with more attention, they realised that it had grown much darker than it need have been at this hour.

"It is raining," said Mr. Hibbert rising quickly, "there is not a moment to lose."

As they hurried down the steep incline, as fast as creepers and tree-trunks would allow them, shouts greeted them from below. They had been missed and were being searched for.

"Here are both the babes in the wood," called out the doctor, who was at the head of the scouring party.

"And together," said Miss McCrie to herself. "We have sent on the fever-patients," she explained to Marian, "so as to get them under shelter as quickly as possible."

The two hours that followed were always remembered by Marian as two of the most hurried and moistest hours of her life; and when at length in the falling darkness, Lot 13 was reached, she was wet through, in spite of shawls and water-proofs.

A day of this sort seldom closes without various backward glances being thrown on its events, and various reflections, more or less interesting, being made on their results. Although this day was no exception to the rule, yet the reflections of some of the members of the party are not worth recording. Those that seemed to call for preservation have been noted here below.

Miss McCrie's reflection as she cantered homewards was :

"I wonder whether I am going to have a second couple on my hands? That little excursion into the forest looks most delightfully promising."

Mr. Hibbert said to himself :

"I certainly have never seen her so much moved as she was to-day by my story; and, at any rate, it is quite evident that I am not ridiculous in her eyes. Can it mean more than this? Nonsense, I have made one mistake in my life, and I am too old and too wise to make a second. And yet those signs of emotion in a nature as reserved as hers——"

Meanwhile Marian, while exchanging her wet clothes for dry ones, was reflecting :

"Of course it requires to be learnt, just as much as anything else ; but I think I can say on the whole that my experiment has been a success."

Mr. Brooke's reflection, while rolling up his linen coat into a damp ball and furiously hurling it into a corner of the room, was :

"I'm not so sure, after all, whether I'd not rather be roasted than boiled !"

Jess's reflection was nothing but : "How happy, oh how happy I am !"

CHAPTER XXI.

WHITE VILLAGE.

MARIAN's dreams on the night after the picnic were the reverse of soothing. Sometimes Daisy, mounted on a peculiarly steady mule, would gallop past her mind's eye, and sometimes Jess, riding a giraffe, and with a mushroom hat on her head, followed closely on her heels. Now and then she would start wide awake, convinced that a palm had crashed down close beside her, and whenever she struck a match she was quite astonished to see how much of the night there still remained to get through. It was not until close to the dawn that she fell at last into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

When she opened her eyes again it was broad daylight. "My morning walk !" was her first thought, as she sat up hastily in bed : "It will be too hot for my morning walk !"

But, strangely enough, the moment that she put her foot to the floor she became aware that she was not at all inclined for a morning walk. The mere idea of toiling up a hill-side somehow made her shiver and sit down on the nearest chair.

"I wonder what can make my feet so heavy," she reflected. "I haven't been swallowing any lead that I know of."

When she had slowly dressed, she dragged herself out on to the empty verandah, where the wind was making the rocking-chairs swing with a sound as of ever so many babies being

put to sleep. The remains of breakfast still stood about on the table there, but not a soul was visible.

"So father is gone already. I suppose he is not further off than the sugar-works." But then she remembered that they were not boiling this week. Perhaps he had ridden somewhere with Mr. Ritchie, but Mr. Ritchie had spoken of going in to town to-day on some business of his own, so that would not do either as an explanation. When Catherine, the black housemaid, appeared Marian put a question. Yes, the "Buccra" had gone off on horseback quite two hours ago.

"And not with Mr. Ritchie?"

"No, ma'am; he quite by hisself entaarly."

"And you don't know whereto?"

"I ca'an't say rightly at a'al, ma'am; praps Solomon he know."

But Solomon, in spite of his name, was not a bit wiser than anybody else, and knew only that the "Buccra" had breakfasted in a hurry and had called him some bad names because of his boots not being brushed, and had then ridden away without having said whither he was bound.

"He will be back for luncheon, no doubt," said Marian. "Bring me my tea."

But while she was languidly mixing tinned milk with her tea, a new idea came into her mind. Until this moment she had completely forgotten the incident of the Coolie who had so very nearly persuaded her father to give up the picnic by talking of a mule with a bad leg. Now she remembered it all again, and Mr. Rudd's grave words of warning came back to her mind. Coming from the sanguine Mr. Rudd the warning had a special weight.

Although she had not entirely grasped the history of that mule's leg, yet it was clear to her that if her father had gone to White Village he certainly had gone in the character of an avenging angel; and Mr. Brooke had talked of avenging angels having a bad time of it here.

Marian had given up mixing the tinned milk in her cup and was desperately asking herself what to do. Why, he had not even got a revolver, she was quite sure of that. Some-

thing *must* be done, but what? Send Solomon after him? But would Solomon go? Was it not more likely that he would gallop till out of sight and then lie down and bask in the sun? And supposing he went, would one single nigger with nothing more formidable than a stick in his hand be enough reinforcement against a mob of howling Indians? Oh, if only she had someone to advise her, some civilised Christian with a white skin! Even Mr. Ritchie would at this moment have been worth his weight in gold.

But nothing of all this appeared on her face while Solomon stood by, waiting for orders, and it was without any trace of excitement in her manner that, after a minute's silence, she turned to the black and told him to saddle a mule for her and another for himself.

"And tell Albert that he is to go too," she added.

She had come to the conclusion that the only way of controlling the movements of the rescuers was to accompany them. As she went back into her room and looked out her riding-skirt, all traces of languor had disappeared from her movements. If her feet were heavy she did not notice it now.

The riding-skirt was adjusted long before the mules were ready, but it was not destined to be required that day. Returning to the gallery with the intention—suggested by prudence—of swallowing the remainder of her tea before starting on the expedition, Marian was much surprised to find someone there.

"Mr. Hibbert!"

"I know this is not a correct visiting hour," he began, with a touch of constraint; "but as I am going back to Cassacon this afternoon, I thought I would look in upon your father, and at the same time inquire whether you are none the worse for your wetting, because, after all, you know——"

"Oh, Mr. Hibbert, oh thank heaven that you have come!" interrupted Marian, her face all aglow.

At the sight of him a tremendous weight had fallen from her heart. Since yesterday she felt towards him as towards an old and trusted friend, and, besides, did he not know the

country and the people? If the choice had been given her, she could have selected no better counsellor in this hour of need than Mr. Hibbert.

Mr. Hibbert was so astounded that he made no reply.

"I am in such a difficulty, and perhaps you can help me"—Mr. Hibbert felt sobered—"I am sure you can help me. It is about father;" and in breathless haste Marian proceeded to explain the cause of her anxiety. He let her speak without interruption. She was still speaking when he began to look about him for his riding-cane, which he had laid down on entering. When she drew breath he still said nothing, but made one step towards the entrance. Then he turned: every shade of constraint was gone from his manner now.

"And you say he is gone alone?"

"Quite alone."

"And has no revolver by him?"

"He doesn't possess a revolver that I know of."

"Then I had better lose no time; as for your going, that is mere folly."

By this time Mr. Hibbert had untethered his pony from the bread-fruit tree in front of the house and was in the saddle.

"Oh, Mr. Hibbert, and have you got a revolver?"

"Yes."

"And do you know the way to White Village?"

"Of course I do. You can send the black fellows after me, if they turn up in time; but, as for me, I'm off."

And Marian found herself standing alone upon the steps, gazing after the emaciated figure of the rescuing knight, as it disappeared among the cane-fields. At that moment she found nothing the least ridiculous about his appearance.

Captain Berrincott, meanwhile, was thoroughly enjoying his morning ride, entirely unaware of the alarm he had awakened and of the measures that were being adopted on his behalf.

It was a comparatively fresh morning, owing to last night's rain. Though bright sunshine lay over the cane-fields, the mountains were still smothered in mist, and streams that had

been mere threads yesterday were turned into angry and turbid mountain torrents. Fortunately for himself, as it afterwards appeared, the Captain lost a good deal of time in looking for convenient crossings to these miniature rivers, as well as in asking his way, so that the forenoon was far advanced before his destination was reached.

It so happened that the Coolies of White Village were that day in a state of mind that was both festive and busy. Linen awnings were spread in front of several of the huts, and an extra quantity of rice was being boiled in almost every household. The Captain had chosen a rather unfortunate moment, for everybody was at home, and nobody had time to trouble themselves about such a trifle as a mule's leg. Of course the Captain insisted, and of course the White Villagers resisted. It took some time and trouble to sufficiently detach their attention from the rice and the awnings to call an argument into life, but this being once effected—and, naturally, the Captain could not rest until it was so—he had no further reason to complain of neglect. As door after door was opened, and corner after corner of the linen awnings lifted in order to add some new member to the group that began to gather around his horse, as the red and yellow figures of the women with pans of rice in their hands and babies astride on their hips came to swell the crowd, as the usually so gentle brown eyes lighted up ominously, as broken English turned into rapid Hindostanee and the silver bangles rattled threateningly on all sides—then the Captain's mind was crossed by the thought that a little less attention might perhaps have been preferable. At any rate he was thankful that he had remained in the saddle. Clearly it was, under existing circumstances, by far the most advantageous position to occupy. The Coolies seemed to be of the same opinion, for scarcely had the thought found expression in his mind when a dash was made at his legs by the nearest of his assailants, obviously with the intention of unhorsing him. And now the Captain was yet more thankful, because of another circumstance; for he had not been quite as imprudent as Marian had supposed, and though he possessed no revolver of his own, had borrowed

Mr. Ritchie's. At this juncture he brought it out with a jerk, upon which he immediately felt that his legs were at liberty, and perceived that the various hands which had already closed over his bridle dropped down like lead,—for the Coolies have a mortal dread of fire-arms. Several feminine shrieks were heard on the outskirts of the crowd, and most of the rice-pans and babies disappeared under the awnings, while the men fell back a little from the sides of the horse.

“Further back!” shouted the Captain, who by this time had come to the conclusion that the question of the mule's leg must stand over till a more favourable opportunity. “Make room, I say, you pack of cowards! I'll shoot the first man who touches the bridle!” and he sent a warning shot into the air.

It was a long time since the Captain had handled a firearm of any sort, and whether it was due to the excitement of the moment, or to the inferior quality of Mr. Ritchie's weapon, certain it is that the first pull upon the trigger proved to be the last for the time being. The Captain, seeing the men still hesitate, attempted to fire another air-shot, and discovered that the trigger would not move, its constitution having suffered in its first exploit. He tried again—no use; and now, with that delightful clearness which never fails to illuminate a blunder in the very moment that it becomes irretrievable, he understood how much wiser he would have been if he had attempted no second shot, but, with the smoking weapon in his hand, had broken through the hesitating circle around him. He was still saying this to himself, when with a yell the ring closed in once more, a dozen yellow hands were on the bridle, the useless revolver was knocked out of his grasp, and he himself dragged to the ground with such violence, that for the present he knew no more.

When he at length opened his dazed eyes, Captain Berrincott found himself lying in a huge four-poster bed, which occupied about two-thirds of a very limited apartment, in which goat and sheep-skins, and Carib baskets, and bunches of bananas, and bundles of dried grasses littered the floor. A small black boy, audibly sucking a junk of sugar-cane, and

wearing the yoke of a canary-coloured chemise, from which streamed a few limp canary-coloured strips, was the first figure that met his eye. Bending over him was a profile which, though familiar, seemed at first to be part of a nightmare, but which he gradually recognised as belonging to Mr. Hibbert!

"That was a pretty close shave, I fancy," said the Captain, after a long minute, during which his scattered senses were beginning slowly to return to him. "And, by the way, would you mind telling me, in the first place, where I am, and, in the second place, how the dickens you happen to be here too?"

Mr. Hibbert explained his presence, and informed the Captain that he was at present under the roof of the negro-hut that stood nearest to White Village.

"And what do you suppose they would have done to me if you hadn't arrived—you and your revolver?"

"Made mince-meat of you," said Mr. Hibbert, with perfect simplicity.

"Humph," remarked the Captain, and then was silent for some minutes, apparently struggling with himself.

"He is going to make a speech," reflected Mr. Hibbert, with an inward shudder.

But all the Captain said after that meditative pause was—

"It's a d—d shame of Ritchie to lend about such gimcrack shooting-machines."

While her father still lay stretched out on the four-poster bed, Marian was already beginning to pace the gallery with a step that grew ever more restless. As midday came and went, and afternoon waned towards evening, her eyes scarcely left the scrap of yellow road which was all she could see between the cane-fields; and her fancy—always unpleasantly lively—began to play her all sorts of mischievous tricks. She scarcely noticed that her head was aching. Under these circumstances it was only natural that it should ache; and it was natural, too, that she should feel hot and cold by turns, and that "the balance of yesterday's chicken," as it was technically described by Catherine, and which was served to her somewhere about the middle of the day, should taste something as old kid gloves might be supposed to taste like if boiled down to a stew,

and seasoned with a gravy made of saw-dust and water. What between one thing and another, her nerves were pretty nearly on their last legs by the time that two black specks became visible upon the scrap of yellow road.

Her first impulse was to go and meet them, but, somewhat to her consternation, she now discovered that she could not walk. It was in the rocking-chair, to which she had staggered back again, that her father and Mr. Hibbert found her sitting.

The Captain, while somewhat painfully dismounting, was debating within himself upon a delicate question. Mr. Hibbert had not yet been thanked. Not that the Captain was ungrateful—quite the reverse—but that he laboured under an even more deeply rooted constitutional dislike to giving utterance to his feelings than that from which his daughter suffered. A mere bare and bold "Thank you" would scarcely fit the case here—he was aware of that—and to say more would come dangerously near to a "scene," which of all things in this mortal world the Captain dreaded with a dread that was well-nigh fanatical.

His perplexity was at its height as, leaning perforce on Mr. Hibbert's arm, he mounted the wooden steps. And then his eye fell on Marian, and an idea came to his aid. Why should not she do the job for him?

Marian had risen and come two unsteady steps forward, while her eyes moved inquiringly from her father to Mr. Hibbert. There were a hundred questions on her lips, but all she finally succeeded in saying was:

"Oh, thank God!"

"By all means, thank Him as much as you like," retorted the Captain; "but while you're about it you might as well spare a couple of 'thank you's' for our friend here." And he jerked his chin towards his companion.

"Was there danger?"

"I have a notion that there was, and—and, well, the long and the short of it," broke off the Captain in his most ungracious tone of voice, and making a desperate plunge, "is that Hibbert turned up in the nick of time—saved my life they'd call it in the story-books, I suppose; so if you are being bothered by

any such feeling as gratitude, perhaps you had better say so." And with a blind grab at Mr. Hibbert's hand, which he wrung in an excruciating manner, Captain Berrincott disappeared into the inner apartments.

Marian made a movement as though to follow him, and then turned vehemently towards Mr. Hibbert. But before she had succeeded in speaking he interposed almost coldly:

"Do not trouble to compose pretty speeches. I have done nothing that any other fellow in my place would not have done."

"But, Mr. Hibbert, won't you let me try and say how grateful I feel?"

"If you insist on saying it, of course I must listen, but I think it would simplify matters immensely if we took your gratitude for granted."

She looked at him in consternation. Never before had she been so distinctly aware of the need of sympathy as she was at this moment; and she had been so sure of finding it here! What had come over the man? Ah, what indeed! How could she know that the unfortunate creature was acting only in self-defence, that, with the remnant of prudence which still survived after yesterday's intoxication, he was struggling to keep at arm's length whatever might engender false hopes?

What followed was almost unavoidable. The unexpected chill coming after the strain of the long solitary day, and joined to a physical weakness of which she was not clearly aware, proved too much for Marian's self-control. For the space of a few heart-beats her eyes were fixed on him with something of the wonder of a frightened child; then a mist passed before them, her upper-lip quivered and she burst into tears.

It was the most foolish thing she could have done, but so great was the relief of those tears that for several minutes she made no attempt to check them, but wept on in a sort of reckless enjoyment. As she became a little more composed she was surprised to find herself again sitting in the rocking-chair, never having observed how Mr. Hibbert had led her back to

her seat. He was standing now two paces from her, gazing intently towards the open sea.

"Mr. Hibbert," she said just above her breath.

In the moment that he turned, his look gave her a fresh shock of surprise. Once more, what had come over the man ? Three minutes ago his face had been hard and cold, as though cut out of stone ; what then had happened since to make him look as though he had heard good news or found a treasure ? Whence that glow under his sun-tanned skin, and why did the look in his pale blue eyes make Marian think of a man who is not quite sober ? Why, too, this abrupt leaving-taking and this hurrying away without explanation ? Marian did not understand it at all.

Most likely she would have understood it still less if she could have followed Mr. Hibbert's movements after he was out of sight. Having reached the limits of the village, riding at an insane pace, he pulled his horse back on its haunches, leaped to the ground, threw the reins over the nearest tree-branch, and flung himself face downwards on the ground beside a hedge of dragon's blood, whose flaming red was beginning to be quenched in the first gloom of dusk.

It was to the tangled grasses that he confided his secret. "She has wept, therefore I have hurt her ; but if I have the power to hurt I must also have the power to heal ; does this not stand to reason ?" For all reply the grasses rustled softly against his cheek ; evidently they were of the same opinion. "It is only those whom we love who can hurt us." And then having formed the thought, Mr. Hibbert sat up straight, as though frightened at himself, and gazed with awe-stricken eyes back towards the house which he had just left.

On most paths in life Dame Prudence is doubtless the most excellent guide to whom we can commit ourselves ; but in this case the worthy dame had blundered. Those grateful speeches which this unlucky man had sought to guard against by putting on his densest armour of coldness, would have been harmless compared to this unlucky burst of tears, which, coming at this ill-chosen juncture, proved to be the very

shower that was still wanted to water the tiny seed of hope implanted in his soul by yesterday's events, but which, without these life-giving drops, might yet have died a natural and harmless death.

CHAPTER XXII.

CANE HILL.

TEN days had passed since the day of the picnic, and Marian, very weak still from the fever she had but barely shaken off, was luxuriously stretched in a hammock in the gallery when Catherine, the black housemaid, dropped from the skies with the announcement :

"Please, ma'am, Miss Mercury says as how she's come to fetch you."

Before the sentence was complete "Miss Mercury" herself started up out of the dusk at Catherine's elbow and made a vigorous grab at Marian's hand.

Marian had had fever and every one who had fever always came to Cane Hill in order to recruit ; therefore it was no more than a logical deduction that Marian must come. The air there was ever so much purer than anywhere else on the island.

"But can I leave father alone ?" queried Marian doubtfully.

"Of course you can, it is your duty to your papa to get well with the least possible delay."

Marian still attempted to resist, but of course "Miss Mercury" had her way in the end, and when an hour later the Captain returned home he found the nest empty, and nothing but a hastily-scribbled note from the bird that was flown.

It was pretty nearly dark by the time Cane Hill was reached, so that Marian saw little of her new abode that night. Having dismounted from the buggy, and hand in hand with Miss McCrie charged a grassy slope which boasted not of the pretence of a road, she found herself standing in a

square hall in which doors opened from all sides, and from which a perilously worm-eaten staircase led to an upper story. Up this staircase they walked, with for every step a resonant creak, and, arrived on the upper floor, Marian was hurried into what was to be her bedroom, a very large and lofty apartment containing a fourpost bed, one chair, one table and innumerable small dark objects on the wing, whose real nature it took her some little time to ascertain. The clearing up of this latter point bade fair to undermine Marian's night's rest, for the small dark objects wheeling high above her head while she was preparing for rest, clinging to the mosquito curtains and eying her with their suspicious bead-like eyes after she had retired behind that friendly shelter, proved themselves to be—bats.

And if it had been the grown-up bats alone; but judging from the piteous squeaking which, the moment the candle went out, began to issue from under various rafters of the ceiling, it was Marian's fate to spend her night in a bat-nursery, or rather in the midst of a conglomeration of bat-nurseries.

"This is not to be borne; I must speak to Miss McCrie," she groaned to herself innumerable times while turning and re-turning in her bed.

But it may as well be here noted that when Marian next day timidly let fall some remark about there being rather many bats in her room, the observation completely missed its object, for the reason that bats were things which to Miss McCrie were scarcely more noticeable than the air she breathed.

It was daylight when Marian opened her eyes, for so great is the strength of convalescence that she had actually slept. The bats had apparently had it out in the night and had just gone to bed behind the rafters.

Half-an-hour later she was downstairs and out-of-doors. The house, a steep-roofed, wooden building, embowered in old mango-trees, straggled over a green mound at the foot of the hills. To the right the road led down to the village, to the left a shallow valley, shaded with occasional breadfruit-trees and studded with bamboo-clumps, wound away out of sight.

Marian looked at it longingly, but, in consideration of the low ebb of her strength, wisely refrained and turned her steps backwards.

Her little tour of inspection had given the household time to rub its eyes and look about it. In front of the house Jeremias, the black coachman, was chopping wood to the tune of "Tiddlewinks the Barber," which operation he, however, interrupted in order to inquire, with obviously heart-felt interest, what sort of a night "ma'am" had passed; for Jeremias was a cheerful and benevolent young man, with boundless sources of sympathy at his command.

"I am so glad to hear that the Cap'n is pretty well, ma'am; I am always really and truly glad when I hear of any person being well or happy," was the comprehensive sentence with which he closed the interview and relapsed into his wood chopping.

As she was making for the open door Marian heard her name pronounced, as it seemed to her, close to her ear. Looking up with a start, she found herself near an open window which disclosed to her Miss McCrie, for the first time in her experience of that lady not attired in a riding-habit, but in an old-fashioned white cotton dress, seated at a square wooden table on which reposed three enormous and fearfully business-like looking books, and with a pair of yet more business-like spectacles perched upon her nose.

"Is that really you? What are you doing there?" asked Marian in astonishment.

"Come in here and I will show you. I declare you have forgotten that I am a Government official!"

"To be sure. But somehow I never took it to be so serious as this."

But when, within the next minute, Marian stood within the dining-room of Cane Hill, she needed no further proofs of the serious nature of her hostess's work. At the first glance it was evident that the room was three quarters office and only one quarter dining-room, and that whatever meals were eaten there were eaten on sufferance.

"These three books," explained Miss McCrie, "are the ones

in use, the latest births, deaths and marriages; the old ones are stored on those shelves by the wall. They have no proper place for them in town, and as I frequently am obliged to look up a date it was considered simplest to leave them in my charge."

"And you are responsible for all these documents?"

"With my head—that is to say in plain English, with my pay. But here comes Di with the breakfast."

That first day at Cane Hill was spent principally in exploring the rambling old house. About all the surroundings there clung such a dreamy flavour of unreality, that more than once Marian felt inclined to rub her eyes and ask herself whether she was asleep or awake. Cane Hill was one of those houses which, in spite of there being no white figure to turn out on the stroke of midnight, and no one but the bats to utter unearthly shrieks, is nevertheless haunted in the truest sense of the word. Miss McCrie's brothers and sisters, though invisible to the naked eye, did not give the impression of having permanently retired. Their names were to be met with at every turn. There was "Georgie's painting-room," and "Rosie's study," and "Fred's museum," for in the numerous and defunct family most talents had been represented. Here a strip of embroidery with a rusty needle still sticking in it, "begun by Fanny, my dear," and apparently waiting for Fanny to step in and put in the finishing stitches; there "poor Georgie's" palette with the colours still mixed upon it as he had mixed them on his last day, in the entrance "Walter's" overcoat dangling feebly by a half-rotten loop and considered too sacred to be moved, and very obviously too sacred to be dusted; these and a dozen other things proclaimed that the air was thick with the shades of all the defunct McCries. The drawing-room was a large apartment on the first floor with four windows in a row looking towards the sea, a plank flooring and a rafter ceiling. Walls that had once been painted pale-green and were still called pale-green by Miss McCrie's friends, out of a sort of vague courtesy, although the last vestige of colour had crumbled away about two years ago.

Some old photographs in fancy-work frames, much bleached

and spotted with the heat, were the only ornaments on the walls, while one or two handsome Chippendale tables that had come out from England in the days of the family's prosperity contrasted strangely with their decrepit surroundings. But the glory of the apartment was the funny square piano which stood in the window, and some of whose notes still had a feeble, hoarse tone lingering about them, the rest were dumb. About a dozen ragged songs were cherished in a worm-eaten portfolio. "Nelly's songs," as Miss McCrie explained. "Her voice is quite exquisite ; I wish you could hear her !" And Miss McCrie caught her breath and put up her head, almost as though she were listening for some sound.

The hovering shades were everywhere. Once in the course of the day Marian, opening a wrong door by mistake, found herself in "Harry's laboratory," as her hostess, following upon her heels, informed her ; a small room now deserted, except for some rusty instruments on the window-sill and a skeleton packed neatly in a box in the corner, for Harry had been the doctor brother.

Even the rickety staircase had its ghost—the faint remains of an old French fresco on the landing, half way up, the usual foaming mill-stream and pastoral couple in blouses, flirting in an idyllic, but now almost undecipherable, manner. "Georgie's work," of course, for which reason, too, the white-wash brush had not been allowed to swallow up the ruins.

It was not till the cool of the evening that Miss McCrie consented to a moderate stroll being taken. And now Marian was able to satisfy the curiosity awakened by the inviting glimpse she had had that morning. No more perfect and peaceful scene for a leisurely stroll could have been invented than this shallow and brilliantly green valley winding among the hills, unexpectedly deepening and darkening in the shade, and coming to an end at last in a sort of wonderful leafy dell, in the centre of which two enormous old nutmeg-trees stood side by side.

When they had sat down at the foot of these trees, Marian drew a deep breath and looked around her. The roof overhead was laden and fragrant with spicy fruit, the perfectly

ripe ones being daintily split and showing the bright red network on the kernel, while the ground around the trunks was littered with straw-coloured husks.

"When I was five years old, I used to cook my doll's dinner with them," remarked Miss McCrie, "and when I was ten years old I used to thread them into necklaces. These husks have been most things in their day, from the coin of the realm to death-bringing bullets. Most of the memories of my life are associated with nutmeg scent. It was here that Harry confided to me his plan of going to England; and it was here too that papa broke to us the news of the estate being sold to Tanner and Co. and our all being beggars. Somehow this spot has always been used by the family as a sort of confessional."

There was a pause, during which Marian played with the husks on the ground, but seemed to be thinking of something else.

"Dear me, Miss Berrincott," said Miss McCrie with a half-laugh, "I declare you look as though you had something on your mind. Have the nutmegs infected you too?"

It almost seemed as though the nutmegs had infected Marian, for, after a short, sharp struggle she said almost in a whisper—

"Yes, there *is* something on my mind; it's father. Tanner and Co. want to buy Lot 13, and I *do* so wish father would sell."

"And won't he?"

Marian shook her head.

"He says that to sell would be to declare himself beaten by Uncle Simon. He is spending every penny he has got on the place, all on the chance of its turning up trumps some day. It's exactly as though a sort of poison had got into his veins."

"I have gone through very much the same thing myself," said Miss McCrie, softly.

"His efforts to make the thing pay are getting wilder and wilder," went on Marian, gaining courage. "Mr. Ritchie has persuaded him to get all the machinery new, and there is some talk now about a portable railway, which is to be shifted about

the estate for bringing in the canes. But in order to do all that father would have to sell some more shares, and—and don't laugh at me, please, but really and truly I am beginning to believe in 13 being an unlucky number. At any rate, if Uncle Simon is in any place from where he can look on he ought to be chuckling with delight at the success of his little plan."

Miss McCrie stretched out her hand and laid it upon Marian's.

"I am not going to laugh at you," was all that she said.

There passed some time while the two sat on in the scented shadow, drinking in the peaceful tones that the wind carried up from the village. Miss McCrie had been able to offer her no more substantial comfort than sympathy, and yet Marian's heart was immeasurably lighter since she had spoken. There was something about this intensely energetic and impulsively warm-hearted little lady, cool as a man yet simple as a child, with her strange mixture of mad recklessness and overflowing sympathies, which appealed to Marian's confidence as nothing had ever before appealed.

It was dark even outside the nutmeg dell when Miss McCrie at last made a movement as though to rise.

"Are you quite sure that is all?" she asked, checking herself in the act. "No more secrets for me to-day? Because if you have, we had better have it out in the family confessional."

"But I have no more secrets," said Marian, rising somewhat hastily.

"Quite sure?" Miss McCrie as she put the question could not see Marian's face, but she was thinking of Mr. Hibbert.

"Of course, quite sure," and Marian stepped quickly out of the shade of the nutmeg-tree, giving herself a slight shake as she did so, almost as though she were trying to rid herself of some objectionable influence. There could be no doubt certainly that this heavy fragrance had about it something dangerously conducive to confidences.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH REGISTER.

MARIAN had been a week at Cane Hill when Miss McCrie met her one morning with a scrap of paper in her hand, and a distressed look on her face.

"I have just got a message from one of the villages down on the coast," she began, in a briskly apologetic tone. "They have accomplished one of the finest muddles it has been my lot to come across since I knew what a register meant; mixed up two babies so hopelessly that there is no chance of my disentangling them by proxy. I must start immediately after luncheon, and shall not be back before dark, which means that I must leave you to your own devices the whole of this live-long afternoon."

"You are not exactly very complimentary to me or my devices," said Marian, in some amusement. "Do you not think that my own company ought to be able to drag me through one single afternoon?"

"Yes, to be sure; but how will you amuse yourself? There is the piano, of course, but it has been rather hoarse lately, and you have read most of the books there are. Perhaps you have letters to write?"

"Perhaps. And if not, I am certain to have holes to darn, or buttons to sew on."

"Well, well. I have no choice in the matter," and Miss McCrie gave a sharp little sigh of resignation.

It cost her a real pang to abandon her charge, even for only one afternoon, for Miss McCrie was very intense in everything she did, and within the last week the heart of the wiry little woman had closed pretty completely over the girl whose presence shed so new a light upon her dreary old home. Miss McCrie had visited England in her young days, and her affections still clung to British shores with a regretful tenderness that had something reverential in its nature. Marian embodied for her a hundred thoughts of that far-off country, which to her would ever rank as "home."

Daily strolls up the nutmeg dell had furthered the growth of this apparently so incongruous friendship. Within the last week Marian had got to look with a sort of affectionate awe on this brisk little scrap of a woman, whose life was so full of tragical reminiscences. She could now read aright the droop at the corners of the tight little mouth, and understood that it could not be otherwise.

It had been a week of eventless restfulness, very conducive to convalescence. The weather had been brilliant, and the atmosphere laden with Messrs. Tanner & Co.'s sugar-making, as indeed even a blind person would have been aware of, owing to a certain slobbery and juicy sound which enlivened the village street, and which any one who has been on a sugar-plantation at this season cannot fail to recognise as an undercurrent of cane-sucking.

Luncheon was hurried on by half-an-hour to-day, out of consideration for Miss McCrie's business. It had been settled that Marian was to accompany her for the first mile or so, and then return under the charge of the faithful Jeremias.

They had been riding for about half-an-hour and were engrossed in conversation when Jeremias' voice hailed the ladies from the rear.

"Here we be at Dry River, ma'am ; lady do better turn herself bāck here ; Dry River noat over and above too pleasant place to cross."

Miss McCrie pulled up the Mosquito with a jerk, and looked about her.

The road they had been following was at this point cut right across by what appeared to be a very wide and stony track, shelving down from the hill in irregular curves, broken up by deep fissures, and with here and there a clump of dead reeds, rustling in the breeze with a sharp papery sound.

"Jeremias is right. The Dry River is a nasty bit to cross."

"The Dry River?" repeated Marian, staring in some bewilderment. "Is this a river? I thought it was a road, or rather about ten roads run into one."

"It is a river, and if you were to come here after a couple of really wet days, you probably would not recognise the

place. The water comes from the hills, and at such a tremendous pace, that there is scarcely any guarding against it. My volume of 'Death Registers' could tell you many stories about the place. But duty calls ; I must stop chattering now, and be off."

The final word had apparently been spoken when Miss McCrie turned back once more.

"By-the-bye, Miss Berrincott, would it be bothering you very much—in case any papers are brought this afternoon—of course you cannot make the entries, but would you mind taking charge of the papers for me? Only put them in a safe place till I come back, that is positively all."

Marian gave the assurance required, and within the next minute had turned the head of her mule back towards Cane Hill, while the Mosquito was prancing gingerly away across the stony bed of the Dry River.

It was still early in the afternoon when Marian reached the house, and even after having submitted her glove-buttons and the toes and heels of her stockings to a conscientious inspection there yet remained several hours of complete solitude to be more or less agreeably filled up.

It so happened that there was nothing pressing in the way of letters, the mail having lately gone ; so after having tidied up her drawers with a thoroughness which had rarely fallen to their lot, Marian repaired to the drawing-room and tried the piano. Considering that it was only about every third note on an average that had a tone, and that the songs in the portfolio crumbled away into brown flakes between her fingers, it was only natural that she should give up the music as a bad job, within the first quarter of an hour.

Presently Marian began to wander about from room to room in search of entertainment. She had got as far as the third empty room when she heard steps on the gravel outside, and, looking down, caught sight of a black woman approaching the house.

"A paper to be taken charge of," said Marian to herself, with genuine satisfaction. "Here is occupation at last."

Rapidly descending the staircase she entered the dining-

room. The black woman was already standing outside the low window and peering into the room. It was a death that had to be registered; and, having taken charge of the slip of paper, on which it was recorded that Juno Quashie had died of old age on the 22nd of that month at Fillagree Village, Marian was on the point of remounting the staircase when another step crunched on the gravel outside.

It seemed that business was going to be brisk this afternoon; would it not therefore simplify matters if she established herself in the dining-room once for all?

Accordingly she sat down at the big table and began turning over the pages of the dark-green books. Although she did not know the people, yet a sort of mild entertainment was to be gained by the mere perusal of the names. Such picturesque designations as, Balbina Cupid, Rawlinson Landseer, or Gloriana Bob could not fail to tickle the fancy very much more than any amount of Joneses, Browns and Robinsons could have done. To look out the funny names was surely as good a way as any other of passing the time. Presently she remembered that the old registers would certainly be a yet more grateful hunting-ground, since the quaint appellations were said to be dying out year by year, and going to the shelf by the wall she fetched another of the big dark-green books.

It had been the death-register which Marian had hit upon by chance, and it had been well worth the trouble of fetching, as she ascertained to her delight, when on the second page she discovered a "Shakespeare Wellington" and a "Queen Victoria" recorded side by side.

She had turned over a good many pages more, when in the very thick of the mythological and geographical appellations her eye was all at once caught by her own name, looking among all these Jupiter Sosos and Daniel Liverpools about as incongruous as a correctly cut coat in the midst of a crowd of red and yellow checked shirts.

Berrincott! How, in the name of all the wonders—— But already she had remembered about Uncle Simon's first marriage; this probably was the death entry of that "West Indian

wife" of whom Bernard had spoken in so off-hand a manner beside the cemetery, that first morning at Thornton.

"Caroline Berrincott, wife of Simon Berrincott,"—yes, that was exactly it. So she was called Caroline, was she? And only twenty-four years old, poor thing! Registers were strange things to Marian, and with a newly awakened interest in this unknown "Aunt Caroline," of whose existence she had never been very distinctly aware, she began more closely to scan the headings of the page before her. "*Rank or Profession of Husband: Landed Proprietor. Residence at Time of Death: Lot 13. Date of Death: June 30th, 1859.*"

Marian raised her head and gazed reflectively out of the window. For some reason on which she could not immediately lay hands, the date of '59 was familiar to her. Had it been her parent's marriage-year? No; presently she had it; surely Bernard's parents had been married in '59? But how did this fit in? Here was the first Mrs. Berrincott's death put down in the same year, whereas she had always understood that Uncle Simon had been a widower for at least a couple of years before marrying his second wife. Evidently she must be making some mistake, and yet, now that she came to think of it, there had also been that remark of Bernard's about his parent's silver wedding-day, which—as it had been made in '84—likewise pointed to '59 as the year of their marriage. How then explain this entry that was staring her in the face? *Date of Death: June 30th, 1859.*

"But it cannot be," reflected Marian in growing perplexity. "Even supposing that the date of the year should be right, the day must be wrong, for I know that we came to Thornton on June 28th. and I know that I met Bernard beside the cemetery next morning. Therefore the 29th was the wedding-day. What *can* it all mean?"

Staring at the page however brought no enlightenment. At whatever side of the matter she looked there seemed to be no room for a mistake, although of course it stood to reason that it must exist somewhere. Perhaps Miss McCrie would explain this seeming mystery; should she put the question to her hostess? Marian considered the matter for a minute or two,

but ended by coming to the conclusion that she would rather say nothing. Her mind was not seriously disturbed by the discovery she had made, only mildly puzzled, and her resolution to hold her tongue was purely instinctive. She could not in the least have explained to herself why, when the gravel outside suddenly sputtered under the sound of horses' hoofs, she hastily shut up and half-guiltily pushed away the book over which she had been straining her eyes—for meanwhile the dusk had fallen—almost as though she were afraid of being caught at her late occupation.

She had not yet stood up when already Miss McCrie's voice rang through the open window.

"Ah, so here you are, Miss Registrar General, and at work too, I see; and here I am again, but not alone. The babies are disentangled and I have had a glorious gallop. The Mosquito has behaved like an angel. I have got a surprise for you; come and see!"

Marian looked out of the window just in time to see Mr. Hibbert dismounting.

"I picked him up on the way, and he is going to take supper with us. Aren't you, Mr. Hibbert?"

"I should rather think I am," replied Mr. Hibbert in a tone that was so completely different from his usually so cool and cautious manner of speaking that Marian looked at him in surprise.

Undoubtedly a change had come over the man, but—as she now recognised—she had seen the beginning of that change at their last meeting. He had looked then as though he had heard good news, or found a treasure, and he looked now as though that good news were still true, or as though the treasure then found were already safely stowed under lock and key. And yet no, not quite safely stowed; for the excitement under which he laboured was too obvious to suggest anything as peaceful as perfect security, and mixed with the gaiety there was an undercurrent of anxiety which was for ever making its way to the surface. A close student of human nature could scarcely have failed to see that the man had artificially worked himself up into this frame of mind,

and that a continual strain was required to keep him at the desired pitch. There was something in his ostentatiously light-hearted, almost jaunty manner of talking and moving to-day which contrasted so strangely, nay comically, with his usual sober reserve, that during the whole of that evening Marian did not recover from her astonishment, and that while supping in the kitchen, Jeremias confided to Di that according to his opinion "Mr. Magistrate" was quite "out of his elements" to-day.

Whether this was so or not, it is certain that the evening meal gained considerably by the liveliness of his conversation. Whatever the subject broached, he had something to say. He was just as ready to discuss the Mosquito's merits as to draw pictures of his island residence.

"It's better surely to be king on a strip of sand than slave in the best-kept garden in the world," he laughed; "and I am king at Cassacon."

Marian, despite her astonishment, was honestly delighted to see Mr. Hibbert in such good spirits. He had long counted as a friend; and since the day of the excursion to White Village, he had become also a benefactor, to whom, as she gladly acknowledged, her warmest gratitude was due. Evidently, Marian told herself, Mr. Hibbert was at last beginning to get over his disappointment about that horrid Daisy.

"Is it true that there are still real original Caribs on your island?" she inquired. "Miss McCrie says that all the real ones have died out on St. Clara."

"People don't die out in my kingdom. Yes, there are two unadulterated Caribs among my subjects—James and Joseph Rabacca, father and son."

"What are they like?"

"Imagine a head of the shape of a cocoa-nut, and the colour of a lemon, with slits for eyes, and black wire for hair. That's the yellow Carib."

"I should like to see one," said Marian.

"You shall have your wish. I am certain that either Joseph Rabacca or his lemon-coloured papa will be delighted to accompany me next time I come over—always supposing

that there is going to be a next time. How about that, Miss McCrie? Are you going to repeat your invitation?"

"Nonsense!" was Miss McCrie's unexpected reply. "That's not the way to do the thing at all. Where are your ideas of hospitality, Mr. Hibbert? If Miss Berrincott is anxious to see what a Carib is like, surely it is more satisfactory to see him in his hut with all his funny implements around him, than to have him transported in his Sunday clothes. Since you are king at Cassacon, why don't you ask us to come and look at your kingdom for ourselves?" And Miss McCrie looked with dancing eyes from Mr. Hibbert's face to Marian's, and from Marian's back again to Mr. Hibbert's. On both astonishment was written, but it was Marian who got over her surprise first.

After all, why not? There was much to say in favour of an excursion to Cassacon. It would probably amuse Mr. Hibbert to show off his kingdom, and, besides, did not the carrying out of the plan mean a trip, or rather two trips, in a sailing-boat, a sea-shore ramble, and the exploring of some quite new tropical scenery? Marian saw it all at a glance, and so delighted was she at the vision, that she actually clapped her hands.

"Oh, that is simply splendid! Oh, Miss McCrie, what good ideas you have got! Please let us come, Mr. Hibbert! You are going to invite us, are you not?"

Mr. Hibbert was too busy scanning her face to answer immediately. Closely and eagerly he was watching her expression, striving with all his might to read in it that which he wanted to find. The idea of having *her* as his guest, even for one single day, startled him almost as much as it enchanted him.

"Yes, I am going to invite you," he said abruptly, as though having come to some sudden conclusion.

A rapid parley followed, during which details were settled. The excursion was fixed—weather permitting—for the following Monday. At break of day Miss McCrie and Marian were to sail for Cassacon in one of the large fishing-boats, which a few days' warning generally made it possible to secure. The passage was seldom longer than three hours, so that even

by spending five or six hours on the island, they could easily be back before night.

"That idea was an inspiration," said Miss McCrie to herself while laying her head on the pillow that night. "A whole day to themselves, and the most suggestive surroundings in the world; surely this *must* bring matters to the point!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KING AT HOME.

OF all the small islands that lay scattered round about St. Clara Cassacon was the flattest and probably the windiest. It was so flat that nothing but huts and trees prevented a clear view being gained from one end of the island to the other, and so windy that, except in the height of the still season, nobody's hair had a chance of lying still for more than half a minute at a time. Even the tight nigger-wool seemed as though alive, and as for a young lady whose hair inclined to curl—though, to be sure, young ladies with or without hair were not usual at Cassacon—their heads were so persistently enveloped in a playfully dancing cloud that it was impossible to form an opinion of what they were really like until they had been seen in a still place—in other words, brought under cover.

The only breaks which occurred on the broad, sandy beach, speckled with wet stones and glistening with shallow salt-water pools, was here and there the trunk of a dead tree, and not necessarily of a tree that had grown on Cassacon, but very likely one that had drifted over from some neighbouring island and been deposited here by the waves. Here it stuck half-embedded in the sand, encrusted with shells, strangled with sea-weeds, and slowly rotting away into salt-flavoured moisture, stretching its black and broken branches fantastically against the sky, and looming over the beach like the carcase of some antediluvian monster that had here been stranded.

The beach was bounded by a row of cocoa-nut palms, which formed a sort of gigantic and irregular hedge all round the interior of the island, from which they were supposed to keep off the very worst brunt of the irrepressible wind. They did their best, the poor cocoa-nuts, as was to be seen by the variety of attitudes into which they had got twisted in the fulfilment of their hard duty.

The impression they gave was that of a file of undaunted but perfectly undrilled soldiers, with a touch of desperation in their manner of tossing their heads and waving their arms, and yet determined to die at their post.

The interior of the island was scattered over with groups of little low huts, which consisted more of roofs than of anything else, and often lay so deeply buried in tall grasses that from a distance they had the semblance of big mushrooms. A ragged banana, torn to strips by the wind, stood beside almost every hut, for, despite the self-sacrifice of the poor doomed cocoa-nuts, the tyrant had it pretty much his own way, even behind the barrier.

Such, then, was Mr. Hibbert's kingdom. As for his residence, this was situated on the north side, close behind the barrier of palms. It was only a wooden palace, it is true, with not more than four windows in a row; but what could it matter what it was built of, seeing that the walls were so closely wrapped in a cloak of pale lilac convolvules, that even had they been of Carrara marble, no one could possibly have had a chance of guessing it? A tuft of bamboos, planted one on each side of the house, was all that represented that pleasure-garden in which, as one is accustomed to read, kings are so fond of wandering.

The nearer the great Monday came, the more did Mr. Hibbert's alarm grow at the thought of the day that was to be. Not that any bribe on earth would have induced him to relinquish the prospect. People who had known him three months ago would scarcely have recognised Mr. Hibbert as the same man while plunged in his primitive preparations. He had grown about twenty years younger—over-night, it might almost be said. In its continual hunger after happi-

ness, human nature is very liable to fall a prey to deception. Having talked himself into the idea that Marian loved him, Mr. Hibbert eagerly grasped at every proof that might be taken as supporting his theory, and instinctively closed his eyes to every symptom which, in a cooler frame of mind, might have appeared to him unfavourable. His frame of mind was not cool, and he felt that it must not be allowed to grow cool. Who knows what the world would look like if viewed again with sober eyes? For the present he wanted to be happy. After all, a man cannot go on living for ever without happiness in some shape.

And to-day he actually was happy, though even this sky had its clouds. For instance, the thought that the queen of his heart would have to eat from off a cracked plate was terrible to him; but fortunately his philosophic nature here came to his aid, and after laying the table with his own hands, and disposing the plates so that the chipped edges were as little as possible exposed to view, his majesty, the king of Cassacon Island—having first collected into one room all the chairs that were in possession of their full complement of legs—started for the landing-place with a joyfully beating heart.

He was far too early, of course. It wanted about an hour to the time when the *St. Clara* fishing-boat might reasonably be expected to become visible. Perhaps this was, on the whole, the happiest hour in Mr. Hibbert's life. He had nothing to do but to stand on the little wooden pier, straining his eyes towards the opposite coast, and all the time to draw pictures of that which the day was going to bring. For that it was going to bring something he indistinctly expected, without having formed any definite plan. His state of mind was that of a schoolboy on the very brink of a long and blissful holiday.

After a time the landing-place struck him as far too low for a look-out, and, somewhat to the detriment of his knees and his coat-sleeves, he swung himself on to the nearest of the stranded tree-trunks; scarcely the thing, perhaps, for a district magistrate to do, but Mr. Hibbert was in far too joyous a humour to-day to waste a thought upon his dignity.

This tree had been rotting here for so long a time, that it was scarcely possible to imagine this particular bit of the beach without it. Its gigantic trunk, jagged with broken stumps, and in particular two enormous tusk-like branches protruding from its upper end, appealed so vividly to a sensitive imagination, that an eccentric visitor to Cassacon had once declared it not to be a tree at all, but a dead Mammoth, deposited here by the Deluge. The name had stuck to it ever since, only that in the mouth of the negroes the "Mammoth" had been turned into a "Mamma," so that to every one on the island this particular stranded tree was known as the "Big Mamma."

It was while perched on the shoulders of the "Big Mamma" and feverishly dwelling on the question as to whether Charlie would or would not over-do the chickens, and possibly even singe the soup, that Mr. Hibbert caught his first glimpse of the boat he was expecting, and in less than thirty minutes more he was already handing his guests ashore. Whatever else may have been mixed and misty about his feelings, it is quite certain that at that moment the king of Cassacon Island would have changed places with no other monarch on earth. Never in his experience of her had Marian looked so charming as to-day, in the shady straw hat and the spotless dress which had been donned for the occasion, and which only on the previous evening had issued white as a flower from out of Catherine's black but agile hands; for Marian, too, was in a holiday humour, and looking forward with quiet but not the less intense delight to the long day before her. It was a positive relief to her to have an opportunity, however slight, of showing herself grateful to Mr. Hibbert, and since this visit evidently gave him pleasure, she had felt it to be almost her duty. Also she had arrived determined to be pleased with everything. And she really was pleased, both with the "Big Mamma," which struck her as a mixture of something very awful and very funny, and with the brave file of palms staggering under the assault of the enemy, soldiers whom the deadly bullet has already struck, always falling and yet never fallen. The lilac creepers and the bamboos, and even the unornamented interior of the residence, were viewed with an

interest that could not fail to be flattering. Mr. Hibbert's hopes grew apace, reaching their height during the somewhat nondescript midday meal which had been prepared in so much fear and trembling, but which turned out so successful that even the chipped plates ceased to weigh on the District Magistrate's mind.

"And when you have no visitors like us you always dine alone?" inquired Marian.

"Always alone."

"But you told me that there was a doctor and a judge on the island, and I think you said something about a clergyman too. Why do you never invite them?"

"They are not the sort of people I can invite," he said with a mysterious smile.

"Is there anything wrong with them? Surely one of them must be nice. What is the Doctor called?"

"The Doctor," said Mr. Hibbert, exchanging an inexplicably mischievous look with Miss McCrie, "is called Hibbert." Marian stared a little.

"How strange! Is he a relation of yours?"

"I believe he is. Rather a near relation."

"Then why don't you invite him?"

"Because I don't care for his company. Rather a dreary fellow at best."

"And the Judge?"

"The Judge, oddly enough, is likewise called Hibbert, and is just as dull company as the Doctor."

Marian's eyes opened wider still.

"Surely you are joking, Mr. Hibbert? Please try and be serious, and tell me at least what the clergyman is called."

"The clergyman doesn't exactly exist, but if he did he would probably have the same name."

Miss McCrie here broke down.

"Oh, my dear Miss Berrincott, don't look so bewildered; it is only because dear Mr. Hibbert is in such good spirits to-day that he is talking such nonsense. There is no judge and no doctor on the island; he does it all himself."

"I must beg to say," observed Mr. Hibbert with assumed

gravity, "that no calumny of my kingdom can be allowed to pass here unchallenged. In my official report of the West Indies you will find it printed, black upon white, that the island of Cassacon is furnished not only with a District Magistrate, but likewise with the other personalities I have mentioned."

"Produce them!" laughed Miss McCrie.

"With the greatest pleasure," and Mr. Hibbert executed three elaborate bows towards both ladies, one, as he explained, in the name of Doctor Hibbert, one in the name of Judge Hibbert, and one in the name of His Reverence Chaplain Hibbert. "To be sure," he found it necessary to explain, "when I say that I am a Doctor I don't mean much more than that I keep a stock of sticking-plaster and of arnica, to which the inhabitants of every shade of colour have a tolerably free access, and when I told you that there was a species of half-clergyman on the island, I was only laying claim to the very doubtful honour of being the person to whom delicate cases of conscience are most usually submitted. In justice to the West Indian Government I feel bound to add that all this is only a temporary arrangement, though it *has* been going on for seven years or so. And, upon my word, I am not sure that I don't prefer reigning without ministers. Don't you think I am right, Miss Berrincott?"

During the whole of the meal His Majesty's humour remained at the same happy pitch. He seemed completely to have lost sight of the eccentricity of his own outward appearance. From the first mouthful to the last his possible resemblance to such things as either giraffes or broom-sticks did not once cross his mind, although, by a sort of irony of fate, he had never come so near to looking like a caricature as now in his eagerness and vivacity.

Soon after dinner the trio set out for the Rabaccas hut. The fact of its being a trio was one which weighed considerably on Miss McCrie's mind, and the problem of how to convert it into a pair occupied her without ceasing. Since the great question which, as she felt quite certain, was trembling on Mr. Hibbert's lips could not, in common decency, be spoken

in her presence, it stood to reason that she must be in the way. How therefore get out of it with the least possible delay? Up to a certain point gooseberries are useful, but after that they become a bore.

It was not until the Carib father and son had been carefully passed in review, together with various features of their dwelling which were new to Marian, that Miss McCrie at last caught sight of a possibility. They were slowly retracing their footsteps, for the sun was oppressive, and no one felt inclined for a longer walk, when all at once she discovered that she had left her pocket-handkerchief in the hut of the Rabaccas and must positively go back for it. She was careful, too, to choose her moment for the discovery. The conversation had chanced to turn upon Jess Collins, whose engagement was now proclaimed—or perhaps the fact of its having turned that way was to be ascribed, not so much to chance, as to certain adroit manœuvres of the wily old maid.

"I must positively ride over and see how my fever-patients are progressing," she observed as they walked along between the straggly double row of huts which called itself a village. Small niggers with strips of various coloured shirts streaming like pennons behind them in the wind formed all the living decoration there was to be seen. It was the hot time of the day and nobody was either at work or on the way. Tufts of aromatic grasses scented the air, and beside every second hut the family linen—mostly scarlet or orange in hue—was drying upon the spikes of some low prickly plant, making the stiff green leaves look as though they had burst into monstrous and gorgeous blossoms.

"I wish I could ride over with you," said Marian. "I should like to see Jess again. I shall always feel grateful to her; I can't help fancying that—that I have learned something from Jess."

"I wonder if they really are as happy as they look!" remarked Mr. Hibbert reflectively.

"Of course they are," put in Marian. "Jess explained it all to me. She is happy, not only at being happy, but also at making another person happy, which I am sure must be

the greatest happiness of all. I don't think one ought ever to lose the chance of making people happy when one can."

It was at this juncture that Miss McCrie made the discovery about her handkerchief. Needless to say that Mr. Hibbert offered to go back for it; equally needless to recount how Miss McCrie insisted that nobody but herself could have a chance of discovering the missing article. In fact she was almost ready to swear as to the spot on which she had deposited it, although, oddly enough, it was not possible to describe the position to anyone else. The matter ended by her begging the two others to go on slowly, while she promised to overtake them with the least possible delay.

By this time they were past the last houses of the village, and the road lay between two stretches of pasture-land. At about a hundred paces from the village a bread-fruit tree stood by the road-side, with heavy branches that bent so far earthwards as to form a sort of big green tent which afforded complete protection from the sun. When Marian and Mr. Hibbert, who had resumed their slow progress, reached this point, the former stood still.

"Had we not better wait for Miss McCrie here?" she asked, peering into the cool twilight under the branches.

Mr. Hibbert looked at her without answering. He was asking himself whether this were to be taken as a good symptom or the reverse; was it because she was afraid of Miss McCrie not overtaking them quickly enough, or because she enjoyed the idea of sitting with him under a bread-fruit tree that she had accepted the dumb invitation of this particular tree? Ridiculous question! Of course the former, all the symptoms were good to-day. It was but a doubt that momentarily crossed his mind.

Pushing aside a branch that hung inconveniently low, he held it back for Marian to pass. One big root bulging out of the earth formed a seat ready-made for her, as she acknowledged with childish delight. Here she sat down, while Mr. Hibbert leant against the trunk beside her.

Marian pulled off her hat, and likewise put her head back against the tree-stem. Though the day was not yet ended it

had been a long one already, and she was beginning to feel the need of a short rest. Her convalescence had, indeed, thanks to the invigorating air of Cane Hill, progressed marvellously, but, for all that, there came moments in which she became aware that the full measure of her strength was not yet regained, and this moment under the bread-fruit tree happened to be one of these. A sort of pleasant languor seemed to be stealing into her veins and agreeably numbing her senses. It was a comfort that Mr. Hibbert, too, did not seem inclined for conversation. In the position in which he stood she could not see his face, else it is likely that the agreeable languor would have been dispersed even more rapidly than, in fact, it was. Mr. Hibbert's eyes were shining and his breath coming fast, and he was silent, not because he had nothing to say, but because he had too much to say and was struggling with himself as to how to say it. If ever he was to put his happiness to the test, this was the moment for doing so; the conviction had come upon him suddenly and irresistibly. If *here* and *now*—that is, here in the heart of his own kingdom, and now in this moment of undisturbed privacy—he had not the courage to ask the great question, that question would remain for ever unasked, of that he was certain.

There passed three or four minutes during which he did nothing but attempt to regulate his breath, and, oddly enough, also to steady his hand. In passing through the village he had plucked off a cactus blossom from a bush beside a hut, and had been twirling it between his fingers ever since. The fancy now pursued him that the cactus blossom was not a cactus blossom at all, but a dice-cup, and that he was about to cast a die upon which everything depended. In spite of all he could do, his fingers trembled piteously as they twirled the flower. A feeling of buoyancy had borne him so far, but now that the moment had come, trepidation had the upper hand. Was it not better to go on hoping—and doubting, than to stake everything upon one throw?

"Is that really so?" he asked at last, following his own train of thought.

"Is what really so?"

Mr. Hibbert started slightly. He was not aware of having spoken aloud, and now he recognised that the die was already set rolling and could not be stopped.

"Do you really think that to make another person happy is in itself a happiness,—a *great* happiness, as you just now declared?"

"Yes, I think so, or I would not have said it."

"Do you remember the history I told you, when we were sitting in the forest on the day of the picnic?"

"Of course I remember it. I don't think I shall ever forget it."

The cactus blossom whisked round faster and faster between Mr. Hibbert's fingers.

"If that is really so," he said with, a steadiness which surprised himself, "do you think you could make up your mind to make the 'bony Johnnie' happy?"

"The 'bony Johnnie'? But surely that is yourself? Was not that the name which that horrid Daisy gave you?"

"Yes, it is myself."

"But then——"

She broke off in bewilderment, and looked questioningly into his face. What she saw there could not fail to disperse the remains of that pleasant languor afore-mentioned. Not that she exactly understood what was coming; surely it was not possible——?

But, after all, it was possible, as Marian had to believe when Mr. Hibbert, losing all control over himself, told her in terms of unmistakable passion that he loved her; that until she crossed his path he had thought to have lost the faculty of loving a woman, but that she had taught him otherwise; that, embittered by his early experiences, he had intended to remain cut off from the world and from society for ever, but that the sight of her face had sufficed to melt the bitterness about his heart, and to give him new courage, and awake new hopes.

"You can never love me as I love you," he said with a humility which sat strangely upon him; "of course I know

that ; but I am not mistaken, I cannot be mistaken in believing that I am more to you than a friend,—that—that, in a word, I am something to you."

Marian had listened to him immovable, and very nearly open-mouthed. There is always something a little terrifying about the first declaration of love which a woman hears, more especially if it be unexpected. Mr. Hibbert had been so distinctly classified in her mind as an elderly gentleman, and one who had given up all thoughts of matrimony, that it would probably have surprised her less if Jeremias had sunk on his knees any day at Cane Hill and loudly declared that he loved her, "so true."

"*I am* something to you, am I not?" questioned Mr. Hibbert, eagerly, as she did not speak.

"It is all a mistake," said Marian, having, with an effort, collected a few stray particles of presence of mind. "Of course, you are something to me, a very dear friend, but——"

"Nothing more? Do not say that!" he interrupted almost violently. "It is not true, it *cannot* be true. I implore of you to think before you speak; you don't know what you are doing. Consider a little before you say your next word—consider what it signifies to me. *I am* more to you than a friend, am I not?"

His excitement was so contagious that Marian felt herself seized by a nervous trembling, but all she could do was to repeat mechanically—

"It was a mistake; you are a friend to me; it was all a mistake."

He turned very pale at her words, but he would not yet give in. No happiness is easily relinquished, and when this happiness is a forlorn hope it is often fought for beyond what is due to either common sense or manly dignity.

"Think again," he persisted, eagerly. "After all it may be *you* who are mistaken; you are so young, scarcely more than a child—very likely it is only that you do not clearly understand your own feelings. And I do not ask for much, only that you should give me the right to try and make you happy;

I believe I can do it. You could not have spoken to me as you did that day in the forest, or the day when I came back with your father, if I were not more to you than a mere friend."

Marian sat with her hands tightly clasped in her lap staring straight in front of her. She could not bear to look at Mr. Hibbert. The haggard, scraggy man, pleading his cause in breathless words was so piteous a sight that a compassion which was almost pain took possession of her, making the hot tears well up slowly to her eyes.

"In the forest I was sorry for you," she said, almost in a whisper; "and when you brought back father I was grateful to you—that was how it happened. It is all my fault. Mr. Hibbert, I don't dare to ask you to forgive me."

"I don't believe that there is anything to forgive. I still believe that you do not understand yourself."

Marian pressed her hands more tightly together, and one hot drop rolled off her lashes and fell upon the back of her right hand with a sting like fire. Was it quite impossible to get him to believe that matters really stood thus and not otherwise?

"If I could only convince you——"

"There is only one thing that could convince me," he said, doggedly. "That is if you were to tell me that you loved another man."

Marian's first impulse was indignantly to raise her head. Her lips moved, but no word came.

"You must love another man," he pursued, jealously watching her face. "It is not possible that you could have been blind to a love such as mine, unless you yourself had been absorbed by love—for another man. Is it so?"

Was it so? Oh, surely not. And yet, how was it that of all the men she knew in the world, the vision of only one single face rose before her mind's eye at this moment? She seemed to see close before her the eager eyes, the long, clean sweep of the jaw, the muscles of the sun-tanned throat which had always seemed to her so peculiarly suggestive of strength.

Her fingers strained against each other, and her thoughts began to grow confused.

"Is it so?" repeated Mr. Hibbert's voice beside her. "Be merciful enough to let me hear the truth."

"I suppose it must be so," she said, slowly, not knowing exactly that she said it, but feeling only that, guilty as she was towards this man, she had no right to conceal anything from him.

After she had spoken Marian sat there motionless, lost in wonder at herself. All sorts of things were beginning slowly, very slowly, to become clear to her; things out of the near distance and things out of the far past. And yet it did not feel like a discovery; she seemed to have known it all along. The difference was only that until now she had fought against the admission, and that now, unawares, she had been surprised off her guard. She was not aware of any distress at the thought of having betrayed herself to Mr. Hibbert; it would be more true to say that for the moment she had forgotten that such a person as Mr. Hibbert existed.

The sight of a short, spare figure under a sun-umbrella, coming briskly along the road was the first thing that aroused Marian's attention.

"There is Miss McCrie!" and with a feeling of relief, she rose quickly from her seat on the tree-root.

Mr. Hibbert said nothing, but passed his hand over his eyes like a man who awakes out of a dream. He still held the cactus blossom between his fingers, but the red cup was sadly crushed and faded. The die was fallen and fallen on the wrong side.

"You are looking for us, Miss McCrie, are you not?" said Marian, stepping out from under the green tent. "Here we are!"

CHAPTER XXV.

MISS MERCURY GETS AN IDEA.

THE homeward sail was a very much quieter affair than the sail in the morning had been. Miss McCrie felt thoroughly puzzled. A dozen times at least she had been on the point of turning to Marian, and saying, "Well?" But something in the look which the girl had given her on stepping from out of the shade of the bread-fruit-tree, and something, too, in the strange transformation of Mr. Hibbert's manner, had laid a weight upon her tongue.

There could be no doubt, too, that Marian was tired, and not inclined for conversation. Possibly also the darkening of the sky, and the massing black clouds on the horizon, may have had a depressing effect upon her—thus, at least, Miss McCrie argued, while casting about for reasons to account for the girl's silence. The brilliant day had ended in a gloomy evening. There was something distinctly threatening both in the whistle of the wind and the colour of the clouds. The boat, which in the morning had rocked as gently as a cradle upon the transparent blue waves, now began to plunge like an ill-broken horse.

It was not till after dark that they reached Cane Hill.

"I wonder if the mail has come," said Miss McCrie, as they drew up with a jerk.

As Marian descended from the buggy, she saw that some one was standing in the open doorway. It was not until she had mounted the grassy slope that, somewhat to her surprise, she recognised her father.

"Captain Berrincott!" exclaimed Miss McCrie, recovering her spirits at sight of a new guest. "You are come to supper, I hope?"

"I am come to fetch my daughter," replied the Captain, talking even more rapidly than was his wont. "How long will your packing take, Marian? There is not over-much time to lose."

"Fetch your daughter?" Miss McCrie repeated the words in a sort of stony consternation. "But not to-day, Captain, surely? Has anything happened?"

"Not to-day exactly, but I have come to give her warning. We must positively be off by next mail. Not that anything has happened exactly, but I have had another talk with Ritchie, and we have both come to the conclusion that the only chance for the new machinery is either he or I going home to see about it, and as he understands boiling sugar, and I don't, of course I must go."

By this time they had mounted the rickety staircase and entered the huge drawing-room, where one petroleum lamp was flickering in the draught. Marian had not yet spoken a word since she descended from the buggy. Her father's announcement had taken her so much by surprise that she could not yet be sure of whether she felt glad or not. Arrived in the drawing-room, she sat down dead-tired on the nearest chair, and waited to hear what more there was to come. Miss McCrie also had sat down, while the Captain stumped up and down, according to his wont in critical moments, and continued to talk in the same rapid tone, which had in it something of irritation, and which matched the look of worry on his face. "It is just as though a sort of poison had got into his veins." Marian's words on that first evening in the nutmeg dell came back to Miss McCrie's mind as she watched the Captain. Miss McCrie knew what that poison was far better than did Marian; she recognised the symptoms of that great "Sugar Fever," with which the poor Captain likewise had been infected.

His talk, as he now feverishly paced the floor, was all of sugar; what Mr. Ritchie had said, and what was to be expected of the new machinery, and what were the prospects of the season. A deep depression came over Marian as she listened, and even Miss McCrie was silent, but so engrossed was the Captain in his theme that he never noticed how the conversation had grown to be a monologue.

It was in the midst of a dissertation, on the merits of the

new portable railway, that the Captain suddenly stood still and struck his forehead.

"Ye gods and little fishes ! I declare I have forgotten to give you my second piece of news. Did I tell you that Bernard was come ?"

"Bernard !" It was Marian who spoke, starting from her chair. Miss McCrie, not knowing who Bernard was, looked inquiringly from father to daughter.

Marian had sat down again almost in the same instant that she had stood up. As she put up her hands to feel if her cheeks were very hot, she was intensely grateful to the petroleum lamp for burning so dimly. And yet, in spite of her terror of betraying herself, she could not resist saying—

"Is Bernard really come, father ?"

"Yes, he is really come. The idea of my forgetting to tell you ! He has got some business over here, it seems, and so ran over with the mail, without any warning. Never was so astonished in my life as when he walked in upon me this afternoon."

"But who is Bernard ?" asked Miss McCrie, looking at Marian.

It was the Captain who answered.

"Haven't I explained ? Why, Bernard is my nephew, of course, Marian's cousin."

"Oh, Marian's cousin," repeated Miss McCrie, meditatively. "And where is this cousin now ?"

"At Lot 13. But he is coming over here to-morrow to dig about among your registers. It seems that there is some ridiculous story afloat as to his father's second marriage not having been quite on the square ; something about a screw being loose about the date of the first Mrs. Simon's death. Evidently a trick for squeezing money, invented by that fellow Silkworth."

"I always thought that Mr. Silkworth was rather a dangerous person," said Miss McCrie. "Please tell your nephew that he is welcome to dig among my registers. I hope and trust that he will find there what he wants."

"He can't well help doing that, surely ; for *not* to find it,

that is to say, to find that Silkworth was right and that the first Mrs. Simon hadn't died until after the second one had been married, would mean—let me see, what would it mean, exactly ? ”

“ It could only mean that the marriage was invalid. ”

“ Bless me, yes ; and the estate ? ”

“ If it is entailed it would of course pass on to the next heir. ”

The Captain stood for a minute plunged in deep thought ; then angrily shook his head.

“ It's impossible. Those sort of things don't happen in real life. ”

It had only at this moment struck him that he was the next heir. So bewildering were the reflections awakened by this thought that he lost no further time in beating a retreat.

“ On Wednesday, then, ” were his last words to Marian. “ Mind you-lose no time with your boxes. The mail goes on Thursday. ”

Marian had not spoken since she asked her father whether Bernard had really come. It was not until Miss McCrie had twice told her that she ought to go to bed that her rigid attitude relaxed and she slowly rose from her chair. The candle in the big bedroom had been lit and good-night had already been said when the little lady lingering with her own light in her hand, remarked almost hesitatingly—

“ You never told me that you had a cousin called Bernard ? ”

“ Didn't I ? No, I suppose I didn't. Well, you will see him to-morrow. ” “ And so will I ! ” a glad voice cried out within her.

“ I remember poor Caroline Berrincott quite well, ” went on Miss McCrie, still lingering, “ though I fancy I must have been on one of the other islands at the time of her death. ”

“ Ah, really ? ” said Marian, absently, being obviously absorbed in some other train of thought.

Evidently, there were going to be no confidences made to-night.

“ One more good-night, ” said Miss McCrie, resigning her-

self to the situation. "I mustn't forget that I have a hard day before me, considering that I have promised to break in Tanner Junior's new mare for him, and want to make the beginning to-morrow, weather permitting. Dear me, aren't those drops on the roof already?"

As Miss McCrie walked through the draughty passages to her bedroom, shading her candle with her hand, her mind was very busy. She almost thought that she had found a solution for the riddle of the afternoon.

Marian, left to herself, began by retreating behind the mosquito curtains, in order to be out of reach of the bats, and then laid herself down in her clothes, not to sleep, but to try and think. It was no easy task, for the day's events might well have sufficed for a month. Yet, as she laid with her face buried in the pillow, she remembered only one of these events. Mr. Hibbert's declaration and the prospect of her own immediate departure were not engrossing her then, she thought of nothing but of this news concerning Bernard, this danger threatening him—after her discovery of the other day she could no longer doubt that the danger actually existed—and of how to avert it. The marriage declared invalid—the estate passed on to the next heir—these things would happen should Mr. Silkworth's assertion prove itself to have been well-founded. Bernard to give up Thornton? Marian tried to picture to herself what Bernard would look like living in lodgings or wearing a shabby coat. By the pain which the thought gave her she would have understood that she loved her cousin, even had her eyes not already been opened to the truth. There was no more attempt at self-deception. Since she had spoken to Mr. Hibbert the words which killed hope in his heart for ever, everything had become clear to her own eyes. The danger which threatened Bernard must be averted, but how? how? how? The question pursued her during the whole of the live-long night; even the shutters seemed to be creaking out the ominous word as they swayed in the wind, and even the baby bats squeaked a succession of shrill "hows!" from their nests between the rafters.

Next morning before breakfast, when not more than a few

stray drops of rain had fallen, Miss McCrie's attention was already absorbed by Tanner Junior's mare. There was no time to lose, as obviously it was settling into a wet day, and the consequence was that when Marian looked out of the window of the dining-room, whither she had repaired in order to take another look at the old register which had puzzled her the other day, the first sight which met her eyes was that of a vicious-looking brown horse, ridden by Miss McCrie, and bouncing backwards and forwards in its vain endeavours to unhorse that lady. From a respectful distance Jeremias was watching the struggle, and above his shoulder Di's broad countenance loomed duskily, while a smell of singed milk, coming from some back region, spoke of duties neglected in favour of pleasure.

As Marian came down stairs she had been wondering whether she would be able to secure a quiet moment for the examination of the registers. That question was answered now; nothing could have been more perfect than this. She was alone, not only in the dining-room, but, in point of fact, in the house; and as, moreover, breakfast was nearly an hour late that morning, there could be no doubt that neither time nor opportunity were wanting for ever so exhaustive a scrutiny of the old green volumes on the shelf. It was still with them she was busied when Miss McCrie at last entered the dining-room, tired but triumphant, with her whip in two pieces, and her hat smashed in.

"The rest of that beast's education must stand over till another day," she remarked, dropping on to the nearest chair. "It's all up with the weather to-day," and even as she spoke a perfect cloud of raindrops, was carried into the room by a gust of wind. "Goodness, gracious, Miss Berrincott! I am afraid you must have passed a very indifferent night; do you know that you are literally as white as a sheet?"

It was quite true. Marian, who at Miss McCrie's entrance had turned quickly from the shelf on the wall, and was now standing in the full light, displayed a face of an almost ashen pallor. The sleepless night was plainly visible in the blue shadows about the temples, while a nervous twitching at the

corners of the mouth betrayed some more deeply seated cause of distress. At Miss McCrie's remark her hands went up to her face, with some appearance of confusion.

"No, it is quite true," she stammered, evidently commanding her voice with difficulty. "I was not able to sleep."

"Why, I do believe that you have been tidying up my shelves for me!" chattered on Miss McCrie. "This is true Christian charity, more especially, as a quite brand-new Inspector is coming to turn them over this week."

"The shelves?" repeated Marian, with a touch of sharpness. "I haven't been near the shelves at all. I—I have been looking out of the window the whole time."

And then she bit her lip, for it was the first deliberate lie she had told in her life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MEETING.

THE Royal mail steamer *Stella* had had an exceptionally fine passage for the time of the year, and yet, despite dancing and athletic sports, which had come in for more than their full share of attention, the young lady passengers of the *Stella* were dissatisfied. Not because of any dearth of victims on whom to practice either smiles or glances, but because among the *jeunesse dorée* there was one individual, off the blank armour of whose indifference the most pointed arrows glanced harmlessly. This could only be either because he was dense or because he was already engaged. But even this was no explanation, for none of the young ladies on board had ever heard of a young man's density enduring beyond a certain point, and, even supposing he was already engaged, was that any reason for foregoing one of those harmless little steamer flirtations which from time immemorial have been counted among the surest remedies for the tediousness of a long voy-

age? Partly because he was good-looking, but more distinctly because he was callous, Bernard had become an object of universal attention before the end of the first week.

The only person not aware of it was Bernard himself, and this for the reason that he was too deeply plunged in his own thoughts. This fortnight at sea was like a short respite in the midst of a long continued turmoil, like a glimpse taken into the future from off the top of a loftily planted watch-tower. What he saw there was somehow not exactly what he had expected to see. Strain his imagination as he might he could not conjure up before his mind's eye any picture of domestic bliss in which Sybil played the chief part. He could see her in a hundred attitudes, but never doing anything except looking beautiful. "But I will teach her," he said to himself; "I will teach her to take interest in that which interests me. I will discuss my projects with her, we must have a part in each other's lives; we must——"

And once more he would turn away with his thought unfinished, confronted by a vision of Sybil's beautiful, serene, and impassive face.

It was beginning to be clear to him that his expectations with regard to love had been pitched several degrees too high. That came from all the nonsense that those poet-fellows were for ever talking and writing about the "tender passion." Even supposing the chosen object to be not free of imperfections, he had always understood that love was blind; why then, was he able to see things which he would rather not have seen?

There is such a thing as being triumphant without being satisfied. The prize which Bernard had striven for was his, or as good as his; was it possible that, now that he held it in his hand, he began already to recognize that it had not been worth the struggle? A suspicion, a very faint suspicion that this creature who was so glorious and queenly to look at was dangerously apt to reveal herself as the most commonplace of women crossed and recrossed his mind. "I am a fraud;" the words which Sybil had spoken of herself not a year ago started up to confront him at all sorts of moments. Of course they

were nonsense, but he wished they had not this unpleasant trick of haunting him.

Once in sight of West Indian shores sentimental reflections turned to practical surmises. Instead of speculating upon Sybil's capabilities of affection, he began to wonder which would be the quickest way of obtaining the document he was in search of. The most obvious thing was to consult his Uncle James, and as, moreover, Bernard was not above enjoying the surprise which his unexpected appearance could not fail to create, the result was that that same afternoon, Captain Berrincott had the opportunity—though in a state of considerable flurry—of welcoming his nephew to Lot 13. When the first brunt of explanations had somewhat subsided the Captain began to answer questions as well as to ask them.

"Want to know what I am doing with these collars? Getting them ready for packing, neither more nor less than that. I tell you what, my boy, if you hurry up about this registry business there is no reason why we should not travel home together. The mail goes on Thursday; you can be done by then, can't you?"

"Surely you have got more chance of answering that question than I have. What do you imagine my first step ought to be? I suppose I shall have to drive into town to-morrow?"

"I suppose so. No, stop a bit, I was forgetting Miss McCrie; she's your man, I fancy, and Cane Hill is quite a short ride from here."

It was accordingly settled that on the following day Bernard was to ride over to Cane Hill and search the registers, the Captain, meanwhile, going over to warn Marian of the impending departures, with the result that has already been shown.

When the next morning broke wet and lowering Bernard put off his excursion to the afternoon, but when the afternoon brought no lifting of the clouds, nor any cessation in the drip upon the roof, it became evident that if the Thursday mail was still to enter into Bernard's calculations, there must be no more regard taken to the weather. It was in the midst of a

perfect hurricane of wind and rain that Bernard mounted the Captain's pony at the conclusion of the midday meal.

"I've got an idea," said the Captain at the last moment. "If you spend the night at Cane Hill, as I fancy you will, is there any reason why you should not bring Marian over in the morning? It would save me the trip."

"No reason that I know of except want of confidence in your nephew. Good-bye, Uncle James, and to-morrow at this time expect me back with both Marian and the certificate."

Bernard had been riding for half-an-hour and was approaching Cane Hill, when upon the miry and deserted road the figure of another rider became visible. It was a lean and long-legged man, mounted upon far too small a horse, whose head was, likewise, turned in the direction of Cane Hill. With a genuine sigh of relief, Bernard pressed on his pony; for Solomon's resources of conversation had been exhausted at least ten minutes ago, and that comical figure in advance appeared to hold out some prospect of shortening the remainder of the distance. The mere sight of the scraggy legs, all but touching the ground, had raised Bernard's spirits enormously.

"Vile day, is it not?" he began, in his cheeriest tone of voice, as soon as the two ponies were abreast.

The stranger scanned him slowly from head to foot with a chilly blue eye, after which he assented to the remark concerning the weather in a tone that was at least as chilly.

"I quite expected to be the only traveller on the road to-day."

"So did I," replied the long-legged stranger, ungraciously.

Another man who was not as sure as Bernard invariably felt of being always welcome, might possibly have taken this as a hint, but if it had been intended as such it failed of its effect.

"Not the sort of day to choose for a pleasure excursion, hey?" he laughed. "Your business must be at least as pressing as mine."

Instead of replying to his question, the stranger continued to scrutinize Bernard's face with a puzzled frown on his own.

"It seems to me that we have met before," he observed at last, meditatively.

"Indeed? I am not aware of the pleasure of an acquaintance. My name is Berrincott."

"Berrincott?" The stranger started so violently that Bernard half expected to see him lose his seat. As he turned his scared face towards him Bernard noted that it had grown several degrees paler.

"Then you are Bernard?" he asked, in a quick, breathless tone.

"Yes, I am Bernard."

"Excuse my seeming familiarity. I am beginning to understand. You are the nephew of Captain Berrincott, I presume, and the cousin of—of Miss Berrincott."

"That is exactly what I am."

"And it was you who saw them off in February on board the *Luna*?"

"It was I. Does that explain the familiarity of my face?"

"I believe it does." And the stranger gave Bernard another very keen glance in which something like suspicion seemed for a moment to shine. Then with an effort he appeared to recollect himself, and there followed an introduction.

"I understand then that your cousin is still at Cane Hill," remarked Mr. Hibbert presently.

"Yes, but on the eve of departure. I have pledged myself to bring her over to Lot 13 to-morrow. It is high time, you know, since Uncle James is intending to sail by the Thursday mail."

Again Mr. Hibbert started nervously. "By the Thursday mail? Captain Berrincott? Are you sure you are making no mistake?"

"None whatever. It's something connected with the purchase of machinery which is making him hurry up his departure. And I am delighted with the arrangement," added Bernard, gaily, "since it assures me pleasant travelling companions for the voyage home,—always supposing that I can clear off my business before Thursday. Uncle James can't help

being entertaining, and Marian, as possibly you have found out already, is an excellent little girl in her way when once you get to know her."

Mr. Hibbert did not reply immediately. Something in Bernard's words seemed to have astonished him beyond measure.

"You intend therefore to travel home in the same ship with your relations?" he asked, after a pause, scanning his companion's youthful figure with a disapproving eye.

"Of course I do," said Bernard, who from that moment forward had to bear the chief brunt of the conversation, seeing that Mr. Hibbert had relapsed into a meditative mood.

At the door of Cane Hill the dripping travellers were received by Miss McCrie, in her most hospitable frame of mind.

"This is first rate, two guests, when I had only been looking for one. You are Mr. Berrincott, of course; I know all about you already; you have come over on business. Bless me, and Mr. Hibbert! What can I serve your Majesty with to-day?"

"Business matters, too," explained Mr. Hibbert, somewhat hurriedly. "It's about that new Inspector, you know. I had about half-a-dozen schedules waiting to be filled up, and as I didn't feel sure of trusting any one with them, I thought it simplest to come over myself."

"Far simplest," agreed Miss McCrie, with apparent gravity. "Curious, is it not," she added, reflectively, "that neither of us should have thought of the schedules yesterday?"

"Very curious, but our time was so short, you know."

"So it was." "Surely he is not come to repeat his offer," was her inward reflection, "and yet he looks as though he were here with some fixed purpose."

Miss McCrie turned to Bernard.

"And now, Mr. Berrincott, take your choice between the drawing-room and the dining-room; in the former you will find Miss Berrincott waiting to welcome you, in the latter the old registry books are lying ready to be inspected. I have had them dusted and laid out on the table."

"Pleasure first, business afterwards is the motto of all

frivolous and sensible people," said Bernard, with a light-hearted laugh. "Is this the way to the drawing-room?"

"It is. And how about you, Mr. Hibbert? Is business or pleasure to have the *pas*?"

"I am going upstairs," said Mr. Hibbert, whose eyes remained fastened on Bernard almost as though he were afraid of losing sight of him, as he pressed up the rickety steps.

As her cousin entered, Marian rose, and a wave of vivid colour rushed up to her very hair-roots. While she came forward with eyes overflowing with gladness and hands outstretched, Mr. Hibbert stood rigid beside the door, so engrossed in observation that he had even overlooked the necessity of a conventional greeting. Miss McCrie likewise stood aside and was likewise observing, but without being able to come to any very definite conclusion.

"Is not this giving pleasure rather too marked a precedence over business?" she inquired a little hesitatingly, as Bernard, after the first greetings had passed, looked round for a seat.

"By Jove, yes! I suppose I ought to be taking the bull by the horns, I shall enjoy a talk with my little cousin all the more for having cleared off the registers. I don't suppose it will take me ten minutes." Bernard was on the point of turning away when some impulse moved him to take Marian's hand again.

"You wish me good-luck, do you not?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

Afterwards it struck him as strange that she should only have smiled in reply, a happy, it might almost be called a triumphant smile. Of course he knew exactly what he was going to find downstairs, but still he could not help thinking that it would have been more becoming in Marian to have shown a little cousinly anxiety at this crisis.

And meantime Mr. Hibbert still stood by the door, gazing with all his eyes and making mental notes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SANDAL-WOOD BOX.

WITHIN five minutes of the moment when he quitted the drawing-room of Cane Hill, Bernard was standing alone in the dining-room, gazing at the pile of dark-green volumes on the table, and, greatly to his annoyance, aware of a certain hesitation in approaching them. It was only now, when he found himself within touch of the decision of his fate, that his mind was crossed by the somewhat aggravating question as to what could have induced Mr. Silkworth to select this particular form of trick in preference to any other.

Meanwhile, Miss McCrie, having installed her client at his post, had slowly remounted the staircase. For a minute she had hesitated as to whether this were advisable or not—indeed, it was against her principles in general to disturb a *tête-à-tête* of any sort, so long as the participants were of different sexes and of tolerably reconcilable ages—but she did not think that she could have been mistaken as to the meaning of that imploring gaze, which Marian had sent after her as she left the room with Mr. Berrincott. Things at this juncture could “bear a lot of clearing up.” As Miss McCrie put it to herself, it was quite possible that Mr. Berrincott might yet turn out *not* to be the right man; the only thing beyond all doubt was that Mr. Hibbert was the wrong one.

It was evident, too, by his attitude and expression, that the unhappy creature knew this himself. Was this, indeed, the same man whose gaiety had infected both Miss McCrie and Marian not longer ago than yesterday? The light in his eye was quenched, the expression about his thin lips had soured unpleasantly. And yet, despite the despair which had visibly settled on him, it was with a look of distinct hostility that he viewed his hostess's entrance. Was it on a forlorn hope that he had come over? Miss McCrie almost thought it must be so, and in her anxiety to please everybody felt for once in her life thoroughly driven into a corner. What between Ma-

rian's imploring gaze and Mr. Hibbert's lowering brow the poor little lady was at her wits' end. To stay or not to stay? Who could answer that question?

At this critical juncture she had an idea. Turning to one of the Chippendale cabinets, she took out of it an old sandal-wood box, in which for several decades past she had treasured up the Christmas cards sent to her by friends "at home."

"Oh, Miss Berrincott," she briskly began, placing the box on the table beside her, "you know that you promised to tell me the names of all the English flowers, and now you are going to-morrow and I don't know one yet."

She smiled triumphantly as she spoke, for in this way she would be enabled to stay and yet not to stay. Considering that Marian and Mr. Hibbert were established at the far end of the long room, she verily thought that she had hit upon an extremely neat solution of the difficulty. But Mr. Hibbert did not seem to be of this opinion.

"I can write down the names myself," she added hurriedly, at sight of his darkening face, "if only you will tell me what they are. I used to know them long ago, you know, but have forgotten them almost all."

"No, no, I will write them," said Marian, grasping at the chance held out. "It is no trouble at all."

And so it came about, that during the next half-hour Miss McCrie's old Christmas cards played a very much more important part than their dog-eared corners and faded colours would have appeared to fit them for. The washed-out looking holly berries and mistletoe, whose tints had been eaten away by the all-penetrating tropical atmosphere, seemed, now that they were torn from their long seclusion, to be rubbing their eyes and staring about them, as though aware that where palms and mango-trees looked in at the window, they could not possibly be in place.

To Marian these bleached caricatures of English flowers were a true God-send; they saved her from the strain, both of talking and of being silent, of which it was hard to say which was the most oppressive. Mr. Hibbert was entirely unmanageable; he had sat down a few paces from her, with

something distinctly defiant in his attitude, watching her suspiciously from under his down-drawn brows, and breaking silence, when he did so, by some casual question thrown out with regard to her cousin.

"You have known him since you were a child, have you not?"

"Ye—es," said Marian, hesitatingly, "that is to say——" And just at that moment Miss McCrie came up with a card in her hand.

"Pansies," said Marian, with a sigh of relief, as she took up the pencil.

"Oh, so those are pansies? I had always fancied pansies much bigger and more brilliant."

"Having known him since you were a child," resumed Mr. Hibbert, as Miss McCrie recrossed the room, "must make him appear to you as a sort of brother."

There was an almost wicked smile about his lips as he said it, but the watchful light in his eyes grew, if anything, more intense.

"I don't remember any of my brothers, so I can't say what it feels like to have one," answered Marian, almost quite steadily.

Mr. Hibbert frowned angrily, and was opening his lips for a rejoinder when again Miss McCrie was standing beside them.

"I remember the cottage-gardens at home being full of these flowers, but I cannot remember their name. They smell very sweet too. Wall-flowers? Oh, thank you."

"A quite common weed," growled Mr. Hibbert between his teeth. Was that sandal-wood box positively inexhaustible? he asked himself. It almost seemed so, for during the next half-hour, various other "common weeds" were carried over carefully from the other end of the room, to be gladly welcomed on one side and darkly scowled at on the other. Marian's gratitude to the Christmas cards was boundless; thus, a bunch of white narcissus saved her from the necessity of replying to an unpleasantly pointed remark of Mr. Hibbert's, and a big red peony came in most conveniently for

filling up a more than usually awkward pause. The occasional scraps of reminiscences that were apt to crop up in the old maid's mind, in connection with buttercups or dog-roses, did their best in tiding over Marian's difficulties, as well as trying Mr. Hibbert's patience.

By degrees, as minute after minute passed, the strain from which Marian had been suffering relaxed, or rather was exchanged for another. Both Mr. Hibbert's eyes and his questions were losing their power of annoying her; her answers became absent and indifferent, and he himself began to disappear for her, while her eager and impatient gaze was for ever traversing the long room and seeking the open doorway.

"The hunt downstairs seems to be requiring rather more than ten minutes," observed Mr. Hibbert, sharply, having failed to elicit a response to two previous remarks.

At the very moment that he said it, he saw a new expression on Marian's face, and looked quickly towards the door. Bernard was entering; there was a joyful smile on his lips, and yet his eyes had a dazed look in them, as of a man who has had a fright. He crossed the room quite soberly to where Marian was sitting, but after that his calmness gave way.

"It is all right," he said, taking hold of her hand, more because he felt the necessity of giving some vent to his emotion than because it was her hand more than any one else's, and at the same time answering the unspoken words on her lips, for "Is it all right?" was exactly what she had wanted to say, though she had not been successful in doing so.

The storm of congratulations that followed emanated entirely from Miss McCrie. Mr. Hibbert sat in the background and said nothing, and Marian only smiled that same happy smile that had puzzled Bernard when he turned to leave the drawing-room.

"And yet it has been a narrow shave," talked on Bernard, growing voluble as the nearness of the peril he had escaped began to lose some of its first sense of alarm. "Silkworth was right about the year—though how it comes to be '59 beats my comprehension even now—but of course he was wrong

about the day ; June 20, instead of June 30, which, seeing that my father was married on June 29, makes the difference of the whole world to me. And yet I am puzzled, frightfully puzzled ; only nine days' interval—my father cannot have been aware that his first wife had been alive so lately."

Bernard broke off abruptly and threw a glance of inquiry towards Mr. Hibbert. He had been aware of his presence before, but not distinctly, his mind being too deeply saturated with one chief thought to let such details as fellow-mortals appear of importance just at first.

"Perhaps you would prefer having a quiet talk with your cousin," put in Miss McCrie, observing the glance. "You must have so much to say to her." And she began to gather up her cards, looking in some alarm at Mr. Hibbert.

Mr. Hibbert, however, appeared either not to have heard or not to have understood. He remained sitting where he was, in a sort of dogged silence, immovable except for his eyes, which passed continually from Marian to Bernard, and from Bernard back again to Marian.

But Bernard had already recovered from his momentary fit of reserve.

"Nothing that the whole world may not hear," he readily replied. "Don't move, please, on my account. And oh, by-the-by, Miss McCrie, perhaps you can tell me which will be the quickest way to despatch the telegram ? I have had it written out in my pocket-book for a week past."

"Which telegram ?" asked Marian, speaking for the first time.

"The telegram to Mr. Durrant. I promised to wire 'All right' as soon as I had seen the registers."

"Mr. Durrant ?" repeated Marian, with a vague sense of alarm at her heart. "Why does Mr. Durrant need to be told ?"

"Because—hang it all ! I don't care who knows that I am happy ; secrets never were in my line—because Mr. Durrant is Sybil's father, and because Sybil and I are conditionally engaged ; conditionally, that is until to-day, but unconditionally from the moment that the telegram reaches the Monastery.

You wish me joy, my little cousin, do you not? I want you and Sybil to be fond of each other." And he bent to take her hand. But Marian snatched it away and stood up suddenly from her chair.

"Is Sybil that girl in the cream-coloured dress whom you spoke to that evening in the carriage?" she asked, looking him straight in the face and growing rather pale.

"The evening when you took your first jump? Yes, that was Sybil."

"And if the dates in the register-book had not been right you would not have married her?"

"I *could* not have married her, that is to say. Her father would not have given his consent."

"You mean that she would not have married you," returned Marian, with a sharpness which sat strangely upon her. "Oh, what have I done?" and she cast a bewildered look about her, but, meeting the astonished eyes fixed upon her, appeared to recollect herself. "No, I did not mean that." And on an irresistible impulse she added, "But I do not think I can be fond of her."

"You cannot mean that either, Marian," said Bernard, indignantly, while Miss McCrie came to the rescue with a second storm of congratulations.

Mr. Hibbert again said nothing, but was sitting a little more bent forward, in his chair, and if any one had taken the trouble to observe him, it would have been seen that he was scarcely breathing.

"Of course I don't mean that," said Marian, with an excited laugh. "I only meant that I don't think I could be fond of a girl who marries you only because you have got Thornton, and who would give you up if you lost it. That's what I meant, Bernard, don't you understand?"

She was beginning to feel the ground under her feet again, and her colour had come back—rather more vividly, perhaps, than was quite necessary; but anything was better than looking dejected and pale, she told herself desperately. Whatever happened, Bernard must not guess.

And he did not guess. His attention had, indeed, for a

moment been arrested by her unusual manner, but already he was back again at his own interests, glad of so simple an explanation of the puzzle.

"Oh, that's it, is it? But that's all nonsense, you know, my dear Marian. Of course it's very kind and cousinly, you know, and all that sort of thing, to take up my interests so hotly, but Sybil really would have had no choice in the matter; she could not have married without her father's consent."

"Why not?" asked Marian, with a touch of doggedness. "Does she not like you more than she likes her father?"

Bernard looked surprised, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well," he laughed, with, for him, almost a trifle of embarrassment, "that is another question altogether, and one which there is no need to discuss here, since all has turned out well, thank God. I will tell you more about Sybil on the way home, for it is clear now that I can sail on Thursday. You must get to understand her, to—to appreciate her," he added, almost a little defiantly, and looking at Marian, as though he meant to say, "Deny, if you dare, that there *is* anything to appreciate in her."

"There will be no difficulty about a certified copy, will there, Miss McCrie?" and he turned to that lady. "And if there are any other bothers or formalities to be gone through, the things can be sent after me, but as for myself, no one in their senses, surely, would expect me to miss a mail, of my own free will;" and he smiled irresistibly at everybody all round.

"Which of these two blue flowers is a forget-me-not?" asked Miss McCrie, coming rather quickly across the room and placing herself so that she stood between Marian and Bernard. She was glad that she had done so, for, as Marian silently took up the pencil, Miss McCrie noticed that the girl's fingers were shaking pitifully.

But what neither she nor Marian noticed was that in the flurry of the moment the name was written on the wrong card. And in this way it happened that for many years to

come the place of honour in the sandal-wood box was occupied by a usurper, and that until her dying day "Miss Mercury" thought of a blue-bell when she meant a forget-me-not.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

BOTH Bernard and Mr. Hibbert spent that night at Cane Hill. The steady pour which continued all evening furnished Miss McCrie with a welcome excuse for holding fast these two guests. Not that Mr. Hibbert, in particular, required much holding fast ; it was evident that something about Cane Hill still enchained his interest in an unusual degree.

Of course it had not been the schedules nor the impending visit of the new Inspector that had brought Mr. Hibbert to the house that afternoon. They had done very well as an excuse, even if a transparent one ; the real reason had been an idea which had come to him with the early light that morning, and which had seemed to contain a distant glimmer of hope. He had come over with the intention—neither more nor less—of retracting his declaration of yesterday, not, indeed, of saying to Marian in so many words, "I do not love you," but of saying, "Forget that I have said, 'I love you.' It was a moment of madness—who knows ? Perhaps it was even a mistake. Let us be friends as we were before."

Mr. Hibbert was not a cunning man by nature, and yet there was a touch of cunning in that suggestion to be thrown out concerning the non-existence of his love. If anything could rouse her it would be that, for, after all, she was a woman. The whole plan was wisely laid ; for in this way he would escape from the banishment which is the lot of the unsuccessful lover ; and he would be able to watch at a convenient distance for any signs of that successful lover whom he still vaguely and desperately hoped to overcome.

When Bernard named himself, his suspicions had been aroused ; with the recognition that this was the same man who had seen off father and daughter in February, these suspicions had grown apace ; but it was not until the moment when Marian started from her chair and snatched her hand out of Bernard's that positive certainty came to him. What was vague and distant to the eyes of the man who had got what he wanted, was terribly near and clear to the eyes of jealousy. When Marian said, "Is Sybil that girl in the cream-coloured dress, whom you spoke to that evening?" he knew the truth, as certainly as though she had said, "I love my cousin Bernard, and none other but him."

Despite the persistent drip on the roof, Cane Hill was singularly lively that evening, not only upstairs—where Miss McCrie had all the petroleum lamps she possessed collected in the drawing-room, in honour of her extra guests—but also downstairs, where Di and Jeremias indulged in an abnormal quantity of rum and water, on the strength of the dazzlingly liberal tips which Bernard had been unable to resist distributing as a means of celebrating his engagement, and the nearest substitute that came to hand for the rejoicings of tenantry at home. And if noise was to be taken as a gauge, the substitute was a very respectable one. The susceptible Jeremias who, in his own words, was always "reely and truly glad" when he heard of any person being well or happy, celebrated the occasion by a choice of more picturesque than musical songs, and Di—with whom, as the reader scarcely needs to be told, Jeremias looked forward to being happy some day in the same way that "that nice young Buccra" hoped to be happy with "the young lady at home," generously contributed her part to the din by clapping her hands and jingling her glasses in measure to the tune.

Meanwhile, up in the drawing-room, Miss McCrie was doing her best to keep the talk agoing, and was succeeding pretty well. Both Bernard and Marian helped her—Bernard, because he had more to say than he could hope to be done with to-day, and Marian, because, in the reaction of shame that had come over her at the thought of how nearly she had

betrayed her secret that afternoon, she was doing everything that could be done to keep up appearances.

The only person who gave no help to Miss McCrie was Mr. Hibbert. He might as well not have been in the room, for any part he took in the conversation. It was about half an hour after supper when he rose and almost slunk out of the door ; he could do so with impunity under cover of the lively talk and laughter. Nobody was thinking of him.

Outside in the passage he stood still and turned over the thought in his mind. He was suffering acutely at the collapse of all his hopes ; but it was neither his hopes nor their collapse that were occupying him at this moment—it was a torturing curiosity which had got him in its grip. Every word spoken to Bernard that afternoon had sunk into his mind like a stone to the bottom of the water. He had noted his astonishment, his evident bewilderment. Also he knew that an irregularity in a West Indian register was not an impossibility, and it appeared to him ever more and more forcibly that this matter could bear a little more clearing up. What if there were a screw loose about the position of this man who was his rival, whom he hated already with a force of hatred which he had never suspected himself of possessing ? A thrill of wild exultation ran through him at the bare thought of such a possibility. The first thing to suggest itself was an examination of the registers downstairs. It was with no more distinct object in his mind than that of satisfying his curiosity that he had stolen from the room, and that he now felt his way down the unlighted staircase. It was not in his nature to step with this cat-like tread ; he hated himself for doing so ; but the passion within him made everything else appear of small importance.

The dining-room was dark, but Mr. Hibbert knew the nooks and corners of Cane Hill, and had soon provided himself with a candle, by the light of which, and with the kitchen concert echoing in his ears, he presently sat down to his task, for, being equally familiar with the shelves and the green volumes, it had not taken him long to unearth the Death Register of 1859.

He found the entry of the death of Caroline Berrincott without difficulty, and, having carefully read it through, was about to close the volume with a sense of disappointment, when the tallow candle at his elbow, flickering up with a momentary glare, showed him the entry in a fuller light than the one in which he had yet seen it. In that moment his attention was arrested by a circumstance which he had not before observed. All the entries on that page, or indeed in that book, were written in ink that had long since faded ; the record of Caroline Berrincott's death was no exception to the rule, all but the 2 of the 20 in the column headed *Date of Death*, which was a distinct shade blacker than the rest. A casual observer would probably not have noticed it. But Mr. Hibbert was no casual observer. He held the volume nearer to the light and looked again. He stooped so low over the page that he came near to singeing his hair. He examined and tested and made experiments with the tip of his forefinger, and all the time he would hear the sound of laughter above his head, and Jeremias's latest musical ditty sounded lustily from out of the back regions.

After a time he seemed to have arrived at some conclusion. Had there been any one in the room to observe his expression as he laid down the volume and raised his head, it would have been seen that he was looking very much more puzzled than Bernard had looked that afternoon. It was evident to Mr. Hibbert that the Register had been tampered with. Some person had quite recently made an alteration in the date of Caroline Berrincott's death. The freshness of the ink as well as the surface of the paper were enough to prove that it was so ; why, the page, when held up to the light, showed an unmistakable semi-transparency at that one spot. There was only one person of whom Mr. Hibbert knew that his interests could be affected by this date, and that was "that young Berrincott upstairs." This was the reason of the intense astonishment on Mr. Hibbert's face. Of course he hated the man, but there is something between hating a man and believing him capable of a forgery. And yet, could there be another explanation ? Mr. Hibbert, in the excitement of the moment,

decided that there could not. He was a great deal too anxious to jump to a conclusion, too thankful to have something to lay hands on to weigh things very nicely. And this was the man who was loved by *her*!

When he rose from his chair the surprise had gone from his face, and a triumphant light shone there instead. He had got this man in his power; he could and would destroy his position in the world, while demeaning him in Marian's eyes. This was the first distinct thought that came to him, but then followed another.

By destroying his position he would likewise be destroying the prospect of his marriage, and in the thought of Bernard's approaching marriage Mr. Hibbert had, unknown to himself, found a feeble grain of comfort! Perhaps, after all, it would be wiser to let things be as they were. After all, what business was it of his? To both his name and his riches Bernard was welcome, so far as he was concerned, but never to her love. Mr. Hibbert did not rejoin the trio in the drawing-room that evening. He did not feel sure enough of his self-control for doing so, and preferred to grope his way to the room in which he was to spend the night.

But his self-control was to be put to a severer test than any that would have been likely to fall to his share had he faced the supposed danger.

About an hour had passed, and, to judge by the sound of passing footsteps and closing doors, the other inmates of the house had retired to rest, when it began to grow clear to Mr. Hibbert that his only chance for the night was to read himself to sleep. He had not, indeed, intended to go to bed at all, but walking up and down and listening to the bats soon became monotonous, and with his candle in his hand he set out along the passages towards the empty drawing-room, in the hopes of discovering some stray magazine—the duller the better—which might act as a sedative for his overstrained nerves.

But the drawing-room was not quite empty, as it turned out. He had reached the open door when, to his annoyance, he perceived the faint glimmer of a candle at the far end of

the room. Mr. Hibbert was on the point of turning back, when he recognized Marian standing in front of the book-case, with her back turned to him, and scanning the shelves before her, apparently with something of the same purpose that had brought him here.

The choice of reading was not great at Cane Hill, as Mr. Hibbert knew, and the books when taken down from the shelves were found to be full of old marks and underscorings, and with a damp, mouldy smell about them as though for want of airing.

Without reflecting upon the common sense of what he was doing, he advanced into the room. At sound of his footsteps she turned with a start, but exclaimed immediately, almost with relief—

“Oh, it is you, Mr. Hibbert! I am looking for something to read.”

Mr. Hibbert might easily have said “So am I,” and thus given the talk a natural turn; but, instead of doing this, he kept his eyes fixed upon her as he advanced up the room, and did not answer immediately. The relief in her voice had hurt him more than any annoyance could have done; he understood perfectly well that it meant that he was of no account. When he had reached the book-case, he asked—

“Who did you suppose it was?”

“How can I say?” said Marian, with a sort of fictitious lightness, a remnant of the artificial gaiety of the evening. “It might have been Di, or Jeremias, or——”

“Or your cousin Bernard,” completed Mr. Hibbert.

“Or my cousin Bernard,” she said, after a second’s pause, very deliberately. “Why not? I have got what I want. Good-night, Mr. Hibbert;” and taking up her candle with one hand, while with the other she reached at random for the handiest volume on the shelf before him, Marian attempted to pass him.

“One moment more, if you please,” said Mr. Hibbert, in so incisive a tone that Marian stood still, wondering what was to come next. “You think very highly of your cousin Bernard, do you not?” asked Mr. Hibbert, with a twitch at the corners

of his mouth, as of a man who is enjoying some secret but wicked joke.

"Of course I do," said Marian; and her head went up instinctively, for she had guessed at the sneer on his lips without understanding its full meaning.

"You believe him to be true, honest, highminded, incapable of any mean action?"

"Bernard? Good gracious, Mr. Hibbert, what can even put such a question into your head? Of course Bernard is the soul of honour; he is everything that is noble and nothing that is mean; he is so good, so kind, quite incapable even of——"

"Of such an action as a forgery, for instance."

The sound of his own words in the big empty room frightened him after he had spoken them. He had not meant to say it; there had been no distinct intention in his mind when he approached Marian. It was only the sight of the flush on her cheek and the fire in her eyes, of the enthusiastic indignation of her manner that had in one instant, and unawares, broken down the last barrier of his self-control. Even for the sake of the purpose which he had in his mind, it was not so easy to hold his tongue as he fancied it would be when he laid his plan down-stairs.

After he had spoken there was a silence. Marian stood immovable, looking into his face, too much astonished for the first moment to be distinctly alarmed. Then the blood in her cheek slowly retreated, and the fire in her eyes died out.

"What do you mean?" she asked, below her breath.

Mr. Hibbert had begun to recover himself. "Nothing I am bound to tell you," he said, aware of a certain savage enjoyment in the torture he was inflicting. "It was against my will that the remark escaped me. Please forget that I have spoken. Mr. Berrincott's doings are no business of mine."

"Then you think that he——"

She did not finish her phrase, but stood looking at him with the flickering candlelight dancing on her ghastly face.

"I have not said what I think, or what I *know*. It is not

my object to entangle your cousin in disagreeables of that sort. If, in spite of my silence, he does not escape them, at least you will be able to accuse me of nothing. And very likely he may not escape them, for there are the other entries."

"Which other entries?" asked Marian, very quickly, and a new look of panic came into her eyes.

"Nothing. I forgot you could not understand. I can only say again, please forget that I have spoken. I am a little off my balance to-day, Miss Berrincott, as perhaps you have observed. It will be more prudent to say good-night." And, without another word, he turned and left her standing where she was.

This time it was she who would have retained him, if she could. She stood there, struggling with herself, until he had almost reached the door. Then she made a step forward.

"Mr. Hibbert!" she said in an excited whisper.

But he appeared not to have heard, for he kept on his way, walking rather more hurriedly than before. The next minute his steps were moving down the passage, and Marian stood alone in the big room, with the blotches of black shadow leaping up and down upon the walls, and shooting backwards and forwards across the ceiling.

Though Mr. Hibbert had not secured a stray magazine, he was fortunate enough, on regaining his room, to find an old "Williamstown Trumpet" in the pocket of his coat; and this was particularly lucky, for, viewed as an opiate, nothing could be more satisfactory than one of Mr. Rudd's articles upon the sugar-trade. But the district magistrate's nerves must have been quite out of the reach of remedies, for not even that excellent gentleman's disquisition upon "The Relative Merits of Coolie and Negro Labour" was dull enough to put him to sleep that night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FAMILY CONFSSIONAL.

IT was early on the morning after Bernard's coming to Cane Hill that a rather timid knock was heard at the door of Marian's room. She looked up from the box she was packing, just in time to see Miss McCrie enter.

"That knock wasn't at all like you," said Marian, surprised.

"I dare say not. I'm not feeling at all like myself to-day, if it comes to that ;" and, as her hostess kissed her, Marian saw that her eyes were wet. "I have come to help you, if I can ; or, if I can't, merely to look on," continued Miss McCrie. "We have only got the forenoon, you know, as you will have to be off immediately after luncheon ; and, somehow, I feel as if I had so much to say to you still. Would you prefer me to go away ?" she humbly inquired.

"Oh no ; *please* stay," said Marian, eagerly, and then broke off and bent still lower over her box, as though she were trying to settle what she was to say next.

There passed several minutes, during which Miss McCrie sat still, blinking her eyelids rather hard, and wistfully watching Marian's movements, with her mouth very tight shut and the sharp little corners drawn down as low as they would go.

"Mr. Hibbert has got a fair morning for his journey," she observed at last, wondering a little at Marian's silence.

Marian raised her head quickly.

"Mr. Hibbert ! Is he gone ?"

"Yes ; at peep of day."

"Back to Cassacon ?"

"I suppose so. I don't think he has got any more business at St. Clare."

Again Marian bent over her box ; but this time she was only throwing the handkerchiefs and gloves about by way of having something to keep her fingers busy. After a time, she looked up at the window.

"Then you say it is fair ? I had not noticed that it was not

raining. Couldn't we take a turn outside? I can finish my packing afterwards."

The suggestion exactly met Miss McCrie's views; and presently Marian and her friend emerged from the house together.

"It is almost like England," said Marian, drawing her wrap closer round her.

The rain had indeed ceased, but the sun was not shining. To judge from the grey sky, there was more rain to come. The leaves of the mango-trees were dripping with wet, and Marian was thankful that she had put on stout boots.

"Where shall we walk?" asked Miss McCrie.

"I don't care. Wherever there are no people. Oh yes, I do care," said Marian, in the same breath; "let us walk in the nutmeg dell."

"It would be the best for a farewell walk, of course," said Miss McCrie, trying to speak bravely. "But it will be terribly wet."

"Never mind. I want to walk in the nutmeg dell;" and Marian drew her in that direction with a vehemence which in her was unusual.

The long grass had been beaten down by the rain into a moist tangle, and lay over the path in a confused network. The beautiful bamboos were not quite as beautiful as usual, for those tiny leaflets are made to float and quiver, and to-day they hung downwards almost heavily, and almost motionless, partly because they were fringed with beads of moisture, and partly because the air was quite still—the first still day that Marian had experienced since she came to St. Clare. She had often thought what a blessing it would be if the eternal wind were to go to rest for once; but now that the moment had come, she did not like it. The further they went up the valley, the more oppressive did the air seem to become.

"Tell me, Miss McCrie," she began, when they were well out of sight of the house—"tell me this. Is it true that there are more entries than one of a death, for instance, or a marriage? I don't understand these things at all, and I should like to know."

Miss McCrie looked startled, but answered without hesitation:

"Of course there are; there is the entry in the Pamphlet Book in town, and there is the Parish Register, and——"

"So it is not a lie," said Marian, between her teeth; "I thought it was. I thought the entry in your register was the only one."

"Oh, bless me, no! Each act is in evidence four distinct times." As she said it she felt Marian's fingers tightening on her arm.

"Do you mean to say," asked Marian, after a minute, "that if there was any mistake, or—or doubt about a death, for instance, it could be proved by the other registers?"

"Of course it could, most easily." They were in sight of the nutmeg-trees by this time; the dark glossy leaves looked as though they had been newly varnished.

"It will be too wet to sit down," said Miss McCrie, as they drew near to the mighty trunks. She would have stood still, but Marian still pressed forward.

"I do not want to sit down, but I have something to say to you, and I think I can say it more easily here, where we have spoken so often. I don't know how to begin. I have been so foolish, and I am so frightened. Oh, Miss McCrie, dear Miss McCrie, save him for me; I am sure you can save him for me, if you want."

And before Miss McCrie had quite understood what was happening, Marian was sobbing upon her shoulder.

For the first minute or two the little woman instinctively held her tongue, and only gently stroked the brown hair that lay so close to her cheek. To see this girl in a passion of grief, or indeed in a passion of any sort, was so strange to her, that she had even some difficulty in believing the evidence of her senses.

"Is it your cousin Bernard that I am to save?" she asked at last, when she thought she would be heard.

The brown head on her shoulder made a movement, which might have been taken for a nod.

By degrees the sobs subsided, and Marian looked up.

It had been a hurricane, but hurricanes are naturally short. Her breast was indeed still heaving convulsively, and her lips moved with a helpless twitch, but already the poise of her head and the determined gesture with which she passed her handkerchief across her eyes showed that she was beginning to regain the mastery over herself.

There passed several minutes, during which Miss McCrie said nothing more, but only held Marian's hand. It was Marian who spoke first.

"I am better now," she said, with lips that scarcely trembled. "I can breathe. I will explain, and you will see that I am not mad. It is the register of Caroline Berrincott's death which is at the bottom of it all. That day when I was alone in the house, the day you went over to Filagree village, I found out in the register that she had died on June 30, and I knew for certain that Uncle Simon's second marriage had been on June 29—of the same year, of course, I mean. It puzzled me dreadfully, but it was only when father was here on Monday evening that I began to believe in there being something wrong. And next morning, while you were busy with that horse outside, I went to the dining-room to look again; I hoped so dreadfully that there might still be some mistake."

"I see," said Miss McCrie, as Marian broke off. She was holding the girl's hand between her own two, staring all the time straight up the valley, as though she were watching some distant object.

"And you saw that there was no mistake?"

"Not the shadow of one. I looked again and again, and when I saw that she really had died on June 30, and when I thought of Bernard losing everything in the world—I suppose I was mad at the moment, but I——"

"You changed the 3 into a 2? Yes, I see."

Marian looked at her in alarm. "How did you guess? Will other people guess as quickly?"

"Only the people who have got a clue. But how did you manage it?"

"It was very easy," said Marian in a subdued voice. "I

had a very sharp knife, and it was only the lower part of the 3 that had to be scratched out." She checked herself as though struck by a thought. "You have not asked me why I did it ; it must all seem so strange to you."

Miss McCrie smiled a little, though her face wore an anxious frown.

"I think I understand why you did it ;" and she pressed Marian's hand more tightly. "It is not very difficult to understand." After an instant's pause she added quickly, "I also was fond of some one long ago."

In words Marian made no answer, but she raised the little lady's hand and kissed it. At that moment it scarcely seemed to her strange that Miss McCrie should know.

"I would do much more for him," she said, and her voice trembled passionately. "In the first moment yesterday I thought I repented what I had done ; but that was all nonsense. Of course I would have done just the same for him even if I had known that he was engaged to marry another girl. I hope it is not wrong, but I cannot love him less because he cannot love me ?"

Miss McCrie was still looking thoughtfully in front of her.

"Of course that is forgery," she said, following her own train of thought. "I know it is forgery. I wish now that I had not done it, not because it is forgery, but because it has all been a failure, and because I see now how foolish I was to imagine that everything would rest on that one entry. I have done Bernard no good—and if it was only that, but I may have done him a great harm. It never came into my head that he could be suspected,—but Mr. Hibbert suspects him ; he has found out already. I must save him. Oh, dear Miss McCrie," and once more her calmness began to give way, "is there any other way to save him except giving myself up to the police ?"

She was clinging to Miss McCrie's arm, for the feeling of terror had come over her again.

Miss McCrie began by taking her in her arms and kissing her. It was the easiest thing to do, and, besides, it gave her

time to think, for, despite her natural coolness, the little lady was for once thoroughly perplexed and even a little flurried. The question was undoubtedly a serious one, more serious than Marian herself knew.

"Police indeed!" she said, with an energetic little sniff, as soon as she had sufficiently collected her thoughts. "Of course there are plenty of other ways. Leave it all to me, my dear child. You trust me, do you not? I promise that you shall be safe."

"But it is not I, it is Bernard I am afraid for."

"You needn't be. He shall be as safe as yourself."

"But how? What can you do?"

"All sorts of things," said Miss McCrie, vaguely but decisively. "I have got the registers in my charge, you know, so, of course, a great deal depends upon me."

"Do you mean that you are going to help Bernard to keep his name and his fortune?"

Miss McCrie considered for a moment. "I can't do that exactly, even if I wanted to, because I have got no power over the other registers, and the matter, being once stirred up, is certain to come to daylight, but I am sure I can prevent any discovery being made in these entries."

Marian sighed heavily. "I suppose I must be content with this. But if he is to be poor, will you at least swear that he will not be suspected?"

"I swear it," said Miss McCrie, as unblushingly as though she knew exactly what her next step was going to be, whereas the only thing that stood firm in her mind was her fixed determination, at any price and by any means, to shield Marian from the consequences of her rash act. To allay this alarm, which was of the character of a panic, and to send her away in peace of mind, was obviously the first thing to do, else that threat concerning the police might verily be carried out. So sharp a spur was the thought of this danger, that Miss McCrie was not only to clear her brow of the anxious frown that had lain upon it, but even to talk and laugh almost gaily, making light of Marian's fears with an air of conviction which could not fail to quiet them. She kept on in the

same strain while they retraced their steps up the valley, leaving the family confessional behind them.

"Say nothing to your cousin as yet," she whispered hurriedly, as they reached the house. "Leave him in his belief for the present. If the truth has to come out, it must not be at this moment."

Marian looked at her inquiringly, and would have asked more, but there were steps on the stairs, and privacy was at an end for the present.

Nor did the forenoon bring any opportunity for further confidences, for Marian had the packing to do and Miss McCrie had the guest to entertain. The day being fair, even though dull, Bernard was anxious to do the distance on horseback. It had therefore been settled that the boxes should go on the buggy, while Marian and her cousin, with Jeremias as guide, were to follow another road, which, because of the wider curve it made, would afford Bernard a somewhat more satisfactory glimpse of tropical scenery. Miss McCrie had been rather doubtful about this latter part of the plan.

"I don't know about the Dry River," she remarked. "The rain has not been long, but it has been heavy; it is quite possible that it may be flooded. It all depends on the lake in the hills; when once that reaches a certain height, it has no choice but to overflow into the river-bed. What do you think, Jeremias? Will the Dry River be passable?"

But Jeremias, quite contrary to his habit, seemed to have no opinion in the matter. He had been late in bringing the mule and pony round, and now that repeated messages to the stables had had their effect, it seemed pretty evident that he had come straight from deep slumber. Indeed, to judge from his dazed look and the way his head had of sinking forward on his chest while he stood at the animals' heads, there was some reason to suppose that he was not quite awake yet.

"Too much rum," said Miss McCrie to herself. She knew the symptoms well; indeed, after last night's festivities, she might have foreseen them. Had there been another guide at hand she would have replaced Jeremias, but there was none, and probably it was of no consequence. This was the sleepy

stage, but Jeremias knew the road so entirely by heart, that he could show the way just as well in his sleep as out of it.

There were no more questions asked about the Dry River, and presently both travellers were in their saddles. Miss McCrie's eyelids were blinking hard as she watched the figures moving away on the road, but she managed to keep a reassuring smile on her lips as long as there was any danger of Marian looking back, and her handkerchief waved frantically all the time.

"Do not forget!" Marian had whispered into her ear under cover of the farewell embrace.

She stood on the doorstep until the riders had disappeared, then the smile died out, and she turned abruptly back into the house. The handkerchief went straight into her pocket—not up to her eyes. She had no time for crying.

"All safe so far," she reflected, sitting down on the first chair she came across. "The question now is what to do next?"

CHAPTER XXX.

JEREMIAS.

THE first minutes after Bernard and Marian had left Cane Hill passed in almost complete silence, Bernard discreetly holding his tongue in order not to disturb the pangs of parting, from which his little cousin was evidently suffering. Once or twice he made an attempt to draw Jeremias into conversation, but his advances were met by short and sullen answers, so totally at variance with his usual smiling volubility that Marian's attention was at last aroused.

"Leave him alone, Bernard," she entreated, looking back at the negro in some alarm. "I don't know what is the matter with him to-day. He looks almost dangerous."

"I am quite ready to leave him alone, if you will talk to me; but I hate solitary rides."

"You can talk to me now. I have got over the worst, I

think. Well," and she forced herself to smile almost cheerfully, "what shall we talk about?"

"How can you ask? Of course I can only talk of one thing."

"To be sure!" and Marian's face grew hard for a moment.

"I wonder if she has got my cable message by this time? I suppose she must have. Oh, Marian," said Bernard, flushing with pleasure, "just try and picture to yourself the scene at the Monastery: the telegraph boy appearing in the house, Mr. Durrant sending for Sybil, making her the announcement; Sybil's delight and excitement——"

"Can she be excited?" asked Marian, and then bit her lip for having said it. She had only seen Sybil once, but the impression then received was very clear.

Bernard looked annoyed, but went on talking all the faster. As Marian rode beside him, listening to his comments upon the events of the past weeks, and his surmises on those of the immediate future, her sensations began to grow more and more mixed. A feeling of intense discomfort was uppermost. Bernard had left Cane Hill under the belief that nothing was wanted to the crowning of his errand but the certified copy that was to be despatched to England as soon as all formalities had been fulfilled. To Marian it was little short of agony to note the triumphant light in his eye and the joyous smile on his lips, and to know all the time that this man, who thought himself so fortunate and wealthy, was in reality nameless and poor, and would soon be known as such in the eyes of the world. At least she supposed it would be so; her worst fears were indeed quieted, but she saw no hope for the success of the original scheme.

Mingling with the discomfort, as she listened to Bernard, would come pangs of jealousy so sharp that she was frightened at herself, until suddenly there flashed upon her the thought—

"Great God, what am I thinking of! If he is nameless and poor he cannot marry her. Her father will not give his consent; he told me so himself." And for one single moment a mad joy leaped up within her, and a weight, as of a moun-

tain, seemed lifted from her heart. But only for one moment; the next already she saw what his suffering would be, and was suffering with him and for him.

"This is not exactly the same road I came to Cane Hill by," remarked Bernard, presently; "or is it only that being in a good humour makes everything look about twice as jolly? Surely the palms were neither so big nor so green yesterday." He laughed light-heartedly. "I suppose I must, after all, have been in a bit of a funk, though I wasn't aware of it myself. How is it that the humming-birds made no impression on me yesterday?"

"Probably because they were hiding from the rain," said Marian, a little shyly.

"Nonsense! there's no sunshine to-day, either. It's not the weather, it's my state of mind. I tell you that the improvement is universal; everything is more beautiful than it used to be. Are you aware, by-the-bye"—he paused and looked at her in momentary surprise—"that even my little cousin is no exception to the rule? Do you know that you have become quite grown-up since I saw you last, Marian?"

"Have I really?" was trembling bitterly on Marian's lips, but she did not trust herself to speak. Without looking at Bernard she knew that he was still scanning her features with a sort of pleased astonishment, as though under the impression of a newly made discovery. The wonder in his eyes made her heart beat faster, and at the same time it caused her pain.

"You have told me nothing yet of the improvements at Thornton," Marian began nervously, and merely for the sake of breaking the silence which to her was unbearable.

Bernard's face brightened instantly.

"The improvements at Thornton? Oh, I have had quite a new idea about the chimneys of the model cottages." Upon which he plunged joyfully into explanations, for a listener to his plans was always welcome, and of all the listeners in his experience Marian had been by far the most satisfactory.

"Of course you must stay at Thornton often after we are married," he remarked, unconsciously following his own train

of thought. "Oh yes, you must; I will need you, you know, for talking to, when Sybil is busy, for instance, or—or tired," he substituted, aware of its being more appropriate. "You remember our talks at Thornton last summer, don't you, Marian?"

"Yes, I remember them," said Marian, with a quaint little smile. What would she not have given to be able to forget them!

"What is that noise?" she asked, raising her head in the same moment.

Bernard reined in his pony and lent ear somewhat impatiently.

"Only the wind," he assured her, and returned without delay to the subject of the Thornton village.

He had been talking for some minutes more when Marian found courage to interrupt him.

"Bernard, do listen! It isn't the wind; I'm sure it is water."

"Then there is probably a river somewhere near. As I was telling you, the roofs must all be——"

"Good gracious, it must be the Dry River, and we won't be able to cross it!"

Marian's last words were all but drowned in the loud hissing rush which seemed to leap up to meet them as they came round a bend in the road.

"By Jove!" said Bernard, and pulled up his pony short.

To Marian it seemed all but impossible to believe that this was the same spot she had seen once before in Miss McCrie's company. Of the stony river-bed of that day all that was now visible were a few points of rock round which green waters foamed angrily; the rustling clumps of reeds were transformed into islands, soon to be decked with new-born verdure; and all the time more and more of that same dull green water, flecked with streaks of that same yellow foam, came roaring down from the hills, dragging at the grass by the river-side, bringing uprooted bushes with it, rolling the very boulders before it, making the earth shake with its thunder, and filling the air with its spray.

"We shall never be able to cross," said Marian, when the first moment of astonishment was over.

"There may be some place higher up ; Jeremias will know. Why the dickens is that fellow not keeping up with us ?" And they both looked round for Jeremias.

He had been lagging far behind during the whole of the ride, and now appeared at a jog-trot round the turn of the road.

"Jeremias !" shouted Bernard, in order to be heard above the rush of the water, "is there any spot where the river can be crossed, or must we turn back ?"

Apparently he had not shouted loud enough, for Jeremias gave no sign of having heard, but kept on at the same jog-trot, reached the spot where Marian and Bernard were waiting—still without giving any sign—passed them by; then, suddenly raising his whip with a shout and digging his heels into the sides of his mule, turned its head straight towards the river.

"Bernard, he is mad !" cried Marian in alarm. "He is going into the water. Stop him ! oh, stop him !"

With a muttered oath Bernard had started forward, but it was too late. After a struggle of not more than ten seconds the drunken negro had succeeded in urging the terrified mule into the water. For a few paces the beast partially kept its footing ; once it stumbled and recovered itself, but at the second stumble the water had grown deep. It attempted to swim, and was at the same moment seized by the current and whirled out into the middle of the river, where, a clump of reeds intervening, man and steed were lost sight of.

It had happened so quickly that there had been no possibility of an intervention. The mule had not yet disappeared when already Bernard had jumped off his pony, flinging the reins to Marian, and had swung himself on to a rock in the river-bed. He might as well have been at Cane Hill for any help he could give to Jeremias or for anything he could see of him. The reeds were a tantalizing screen, and beyond those reeds glimpses were to be caught of a big green pool, a sort of halting-station for the waters on their journey down from the

hills, where they circled slowly round and round, once and once again, before resuming their headlong course. It was the look of this pool, with its unmistakable character of depth, that first made Bernard feel certain that the negro was lost. The current, roaring and foaming down over the rocks, was not nearly so terrifying as this dark green pool, which, but for the trains of bubbles that swept over its surface, was as smooth as though hewn out of white-veined marble.

Standing upright on the slippery rock, Bernard strained his eyes to see what there was to be seen, but he was blinded by flying spray, and to advance further would simply have been to plunge into the torrent. Suddenly as he stood thus he remembered Marian, and, belonging as he did to the order of men who consider that women are intended only for the amenities of life, and are worse than useless in its emergencies, it was with a distinct feeling of annoyance that he turned back towards her. Marian was sitting rigid in the saddle. Her face was colourless, and her look seemed to be wildly interrogating him.

"Do you think he can have saved himself on one of the islands?" she asked quickly, after the two had looked for an instant in silence into each other's horror-stricken eyes.

Bernard shook his head. "Give me the reins. We must go back for help. Try and keep quiet, Marian, for God's sake! You don't feel like falling off, do you? What's that?"

As he spoke his eye had been caught by a movement on the bank, some dozen yards downstream. Was not that the head of a mule? Bernard took his foot out of the stirrup and ran to the spot just in time to help ashore the exhausted animal which had succeeded in recovering its footing. Of its rider there was no trace.

When Bernard came back, leading the dripping mule, Marian was standing beside her own beast. She did not wait for him to speak. Her eyes had again interrogated him, and she knew what he would say.

"Listen, Bernard. We must not both go; one of us must stay here and watch in case the poor man tries to come

ashore. You can ride quicker; you must go. I will stay here and wait."

"All alone? Are you not afraid?" asked Bernard, aghast at the idea.

"It doesn't matter whether I am or not; one of us *must* stay. Here is your pony. Be quick, Bernard, for God's sake!"

There was no time for further parley. What Marian said sounded like common sense, though it was not at all what he would have expected her to say. Swinging himself into the saddle, and with a parting injunction to her to "keep quiet, for Heaven's sake!"—oblivious of the fact that she was in truth much quieter than he was—Bernard set off at a breathless gallop along the road by which they had come. He was indeed of opinion—having seen that green pool beyond the reeds—that his errand was a fool's errand, but so awful is it to look on with tied hands at a fellow-creature's death that he rode as though his own life depended on it.

"She's a plucky little thing, and no mistake," he kept repeating to himself as he galloped. The pleased surprise with which Marian's self-possession had filled him, was able to pierce even through the pervading horror of the moment. Presently some words that Sybil had spoken with regard to Marian last summer returned to his memory. She had declared then that Marian's coolness on horseback was the result of what she had called an heroic effort of will; could it be that the courage displayed to-day sprang from the same source? The question aroused his curiosity, and, despite his excitement, he was aware that the answer might well chance to place his little cousin in a more interesting light than that in which she had stood until to-day. He would certainly look at her more attentively than he had hitherto done.

To Marian that half hour spent beside the Dry River between the two mules, of which the one nibbled the grass while the other stood with lowered head and shaking knees, was the most trying of her life. Though outwardly quiet she was in reality too excited to be conscious of anything like fear. But the solitude of the spot weighed upon her indistinctly, and the unwonted absence of sunlight. It wanted but one sunbeam

to make of the torrent a gorgeous spectacle, but under this grey sky all the beauty was extinguished, and there remained but the terror. With the gloomy monotony of a nightmare the waters rolled over the stones and the dull green leaves drooped above them. Eyes and ears were ever on the strain. Often she would think to hear a human cry piercing through the roar of the current, and the gurgle of the pools sounded to her hearing like the gasps of a drowning man. If a grass-blade at the water's edge bent aside more quickly than its fellows, or if out there in the river's bed a reed waved unexpectedly, her eyes were on it already. Sometimes she fancied she could see a black hand grasping the edge of a rock, and once the specks of foam on a wave took for her the semblance of a nigger's gleaming eyeballs and teeth. The blood rushed to her heart more than once in expectation, but the suspense passed as it had come, and ever and again her eyes, after sweeping over the banks and scanning the rocks, would return unwillingly and yet irresistibly to what she could see of the big green pool beyond the reeds; and the longer she stood and watched, the more surely did the conviction come over her that poor Jeremias, with all his wide sympathies and instinctive philanthropy, lay buried under that smooth surface. When the last doubt was gone and the strain of attention perforce relaxed, Marian knelt down on the grass between the two mules, and, as well as the reins she was holding would allow her, clasped her hands on her breast.

It was thus that Bernard, returning with succour, found her—her pale face uplifted, her white lips moving in prayer. He had never seen his cousin at her prayers, and at sight of her now he half checked his pony, as though with the instinctive feeling that he had no right to look on this picture. And yet it was one which haunted his mind for long.

Without rendering to himself a clear account of his reasonings—indeed amidst the strain and flurry of what now followed no consecutive reasoning was possible—he instinctively felt that henceforward Marian must be taken more seriously, that within this last hour she had become something more

than that "good little girl" to whom he had always showed such patronizing kindness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE "HOTEL."

DESPITE the efforts made and energetically directed by Bernard, the body of poor Jeremias, much gashed and cut about the head, was not recovered till next morning. Marian had been unwilling to leave the spot with the question unsolved, but Bernard, alarmed by her pallor, had asserted his authority, and late that evening the two cousins reached Lot 13 by another road.

Early next morning the start for Williamstown was made. The mail was expected to sail soon after midday, so truly there was no superfluous time. It was a somewhat silent and subdued little party that jogged into town somewhere about eleven o'clock. The yesterday's catastrophe had thrown a deep shadow over the moment of departure. Bernard's triumphant mood was sobered, and nothing but the dread of needlessly postponing her father's departure gave Marian the strength to appear outwardly calm.

Williamstown was in that faint state of bustle which "mail day" could not fail to awaken even here. A couple of grimy coal barges lay alongside of the steamer, and the work of coaling was being carried on by a swarm of half-naked men and women. A few unmistakably European coats were to be seen on the pier, while from time to time boats laden with bananas and pine-apples pushed off from the shore for the benefit of the passengers on board.

The start from Lot 13 had been made earlier than necessary, as it now appeared, since the coaling was not expected to be done before the middle of the afternoon.

"It will be best for Marian to get into her berth at once," Bernard decided when some luncheon had been eaten. "I

shall see you on board first, and then I shall take another look at the place. There is no sense in kicking my heels on board till the middle of the afternoon."

"But there is nothing to see about the place, Bernard."

Despite her almost unbounded confidence in Miss McCrie's powers of averting evil, Marian knew that she would not feel quite at rest so long as Bernard had the soil of St. Clara beneath his feet.

"Oh yes, there is lots to see. You forget that I am not a hardened West Indian like you and Uncle James."

"I tell you what you might do, Bernard," put in the Captain, "you might look up old Rudd. I hadn't time to give him warning of our start."

It was settled accordingly, and Bernard, having seen his uncle and cousin on board, turned once more to descend the ladder.

"Three o'clock!" called out Marian when already he was settled in the boat. "Don't forget that you must be back by three o'clock at latest."

He nodded to her reassuringly as she leant over the steamer's side, and in the same moment already the boat was dancing away over the waves and towards the shore, and Marian stood and watched it with an unaccountable feeling of anxiety upon her.

There were two hours to be passed until his return. She spent the first hour quietly enough in her berth, though the chattering in the coal barge alongside effectually banished sleep. When the second hour began without there being any sign of Bernard, Marian returned to deck and took to scanning the landing place more and more attentively. By this time the deck was growing crowded, and the bustle increasing, but three o'clock came and went and the coal barges were not yet empty, and though several boats came from the shore none of them brought Bernard. Four o'clock had struck and steam was beginning to be got up when Marian, still at her post and still straining her eyes towards the town, became aware that her father was making his way towards her through the crowd.

He was looking very much annoyed, and held a piece of paper in his hand.

"Read that," he said shortly. "It's an awful nuisance."

Marian took the paper, which was apparently a sheet torn out of a note book, and read scrawled upon it in Bernard's handwriting :

"Unexpectedly detained by business. Cannot sail this mail. Please give the man my luggage."

"Something has happened to him," said Marian, looking into her father's face with such an unmistakable expression of terror on her own that the Captain broke into an angry laugh.

"Bless me, child! There's no need to look like a big misfortune. It's a nuisance, since he would have been good company on the voyage, but there's no question of a catastrophe. It isn't likely that he has been bitten by a rat-tailed snake."

Marian said nothing. She was not thinking of a rat-tailed snake, but of a policeman.

As it so happened, however, neither the snake nor the policeman were implicated in Bernard's deferred voyage.

In the moment that he stepped ashore there remained two hours' time before him to be more or less agreeably filled up. It would be safest, he decided, to acquit himself first of his errand to Mr. Rudd, more especially as he would have to ask his way to the house. The Captain had said that any one could direct him. Ah, there, by good luck, was a face he knew; the very thing he wanted. Mr. Hibbert would be sure to know the way to Mr. Rudd's house, and it was Mr. Hibbert whom he now caught sight of, preparing to enter a boat just as he had left his own.

"This is good luck," said Bernard, hurrying up to him and laying his hand on his sleeve. "Do stop for one minute longer. I only want to ask one question." Mr. Hibbert turned sharply at the sound of his voice, and immediately withdrew the foot which he had already placed on the edge of the boat. He looked at Bernard from head to foot, as though to make sure it was he.

"Certainly this is luck," he said, with a sudden brighten-

ing of the eyes. "Pray don't hurry, I am certainly going to stop for much more than one minute. Here is a shilling, Daniel; I don't require your boat to-day."

"But I should be very sorry to disturb your arrangements," said Bernard, a little surprised at this unexpected alacrity.

"You are not disturbing my arrangements. You are the very man I was looking for."

"I? Really this is very kind; but I don't quite——"

"You shall presently. It is tolerably easy to grasp. I have a few words to say to you, Mr. Berrincott. Where shall they be said?"

"On the way to Mr. Rudd's," suggested Bernard. "I have a message for him from my uncle."

"Far too public. We had better go to the hotel."

"But I have only just come from the hotel; and are you quite sure that this, whatever it is, has got to be said?"

"I am quite sure."

There was about the tone an immovable certainty which was not to be resisted. Bernard looked in his face and saw the same certainty shining in the pale blue eyes and stamped about the thin lips. His curiosity began to be aroused.

"To the hotel, then," he said, turning that way.

Mr. Hibbert said nothing while they walked up the short bit of street, and Bernard likewise held his tongue, and cast side glances at his companion which had the object of ascertaining whether or not he was quite in his right mind.

The "Hotel" was a wooden construction possessing a "chief apartment" in the shape of a big room with a deal floor and an attic ceiling, and a "chief attendant" in the person of a small negro girl with a yellow and scarlet handkerchief on her head. The chief apartment also had the remains of some Venetian blinds on the window, and—what was by far the most acceptable feature of the establishment—a branch laden with green oranges lying in perpetuity upon the table, in dumb invitation to whoever chose to help himself.

It was into this room, which chanced to be empty, that Mr. Hibbert led the way. Having cast a glance out of the

windows he returned to the door, and after opening it again and looking up and down the passage he turned rapidly to where Bernard was standing beside the table somewhat mistrustfully watching him.

"Tell me first, do you still keep to your intention of sailing by this mail?"

"Certainly I do. Is it to ask me this that you have brought me in here?"

"And your uncle and cousin are on board?"

"Yes, they are. But allow me to remark that my time is somewhat limited, so if you have any more questions to ask——"

"I have no more questions to ask; I know all that I want to know, but I have a demand to make of you. I want you not to sail by this mail."

Bernard stared back at him in haughty surprise. There was a cool peremptoriness about the tone which greatly enhanced the utter inexplicability of the words. Mr. Hibbert spoke not like a person asking for a favour, but rather like one demanding a right. Neither did his eyes fall before Bernard's inquiring gaze.

"Possibly it may surprise you," he began, after a minute, still speaking steadily, though his eyes were beginning to grow unquiet, "that your movements should interest me. I cannot give you my reasons; enough that I have got reasons, strong reasons for not wishing you to return to England by this mail. I have followed you to Williamstown for the sole purpose of telling you this, and now I ask you once again: Are you ready at my demand to put off your journey to the 15th?"

"Certainly not," answered Bernard without hesitation this time.

The muscles about Mr. Hibbert's mouth gave an ugly twitch, and the pupils of his eyes began rapidly to dilate and to contract. He came up close to where Bernard was standing.

"And you mean to tell me that you intend to spend the next fortnight philandering on board? You think you are at liberty to do that? I could never stand the thought."

"He has lost his heart to Marian, and thinks I am a rival," said Bernard to himself with contemptuous pity.

"Once again," and the threat in Mr. Hibbert's tone grew more unmistakable, "will you put off your journey of your own good will, or will you not?"

"I will not," said Bernard, wrenching himself free of the hand which the other had laid on his sleeve. "And neither will I stand any more of this inexcusable impertinence. Let me pass, Mr. Hibbert, or it will be the worse for you."

For a minute the two men stood opposite each other with gleaming eyes, the young one with the clenched teeth looking almost more dangerous than the elder one with the unsteady mouth. But Mr. Hibbert did not move out of the way.

"I see I must speak more plainly," he said at last in a harsh, grating voice. "I should have preferred to avoid a scene, but you will have it. Well, then, listen: you think my request an impertinent one; I tell you that I can enforce it if I choose. Perhaps you will understand me better if I tell you that I have examined the death register of the year '59."

Bernard looked at him blankly without answering. His doubts with regard to Mr. Hibbert's sanity began to stir again with double force.

"Is that not enough? Understand that your doings and leavings are nothing to me; it is not my mission in life to play the detective, but I want you to know that you are in my power. I have examined the book closely, and nothing would be easier for me than to prove that the entry of Caroline Berrincott's death has been tampered with."

"Caroline Berrincott's death," repeated Bernard stupidly. "Surely you are raving."

"Your simulation of surprise is very good," said Mr. Hibbert impatiently, "but it is wasted upon me, since you can hardly have the face to tell me that the alteration made in the date is news to you."

Bernard paled a little under the sunburn of his skin.

"Look here, Mr. Hibbert," he said, after a pause of sheer astonishment; "this is no joking matter to me, though possibly it may be so to you; you would therefore oblige me

greatly by telling me whether you are serious or not. An alteration made in the date of Caroline Berrincott's death. A *recent* alteration? Are you quite sure you know what you are talking about? You know what this means for me, do you not?"

"I know that the difference between June 20th and June 30th is the difference of the whole world to you," said Mr. Hibbert, but he said it in a different tone, for he was beginning to doubt. The consternation on Bernard's face was painted too broadly to be misread.

"And have you any reason for supposing that June 30th was the original date?"

This time Mr. Hibbert made no reply. He saw that he had made a mistake, and already his thoughts had plunged into another channel.

"Is there any other person whose interest is at stake?" he said, speaking his thought aloud.

"Scarcely. It would need to be a very devoted friend who would consider his personal interests involved in the matter, and I am not aware of having anyone attached to me to the point of forgery."

Mr. Hibbert gave him a startled look. "Surely it is not possible," he said slowly, "that she should have carried her infatuation——"

He broke off abruptly, and for another long minute the two men faced each other in silence. There was a watchful suspicion in the one face and something like a dawning intelligence on the other.

"Surely it is not possible," Bernard was repeating to himself confusedly, "surely it is not possible!"

"This must be enquired into," he said aloud, looking round instinctively for his hat. "There is something here which I do not understand. You are going to have your wish after all, Mr. Hibbert," and he laughed angrily. "I shall certainly have to put off my voyage till this matter is cleared up. I hope you are satisfied."

Mr. Hibbert did not appear to have heard, and though he had got his wish he certainly did not seem satisfied. Looking

back towards him Bernard met the pale blue eyes fixed upon his face with so strange and intense an expression that he stopped in the very act of turning to the door.

"Have you anything more to say to me? I must be going."

Mr. Hibbert still gave no sign of having heard, and Bernard, having waited for another moment, walked to the door, and looking back from there, found himself still followed by the pale blue eyes.

"It is jealousy," said Bernard to himself as he stood still in the passage outside. "The look is not to be mistaken; it is certainly jealousy. Can it be that he has reason to be jealous? The whole thing is the biggest puzzle I have ever come across."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NEW INSPECTOR.

WITHIN the same half hour of his parting with Mr. Hibbert Bernard was on his way back to Cane Hill. His mind was as yet in too hopeless a state of bewilderment to allow of any intelligible theory being formed within it, but nevertheless he was conscious of an uneasy suspicion which he would fain have put from him, and ever and again, for some unaccountable reason, he would seem to see before him Marian's face as he had seen it in the moment when he was starting to search the registers, with that triumphant smile upon it which had appeared to him so out of place.

It was quite dark when he reached Cane Hill. The windows, too, were dark, all but one faint light burning on the ground floor. Bernard dismounted from his hired buggy and felt his way towards the light. After stumbling into the passage through the open house door he turned the first handle to the left which met his hand and discovered that he was in the dining-room.

A single candle in a pewter candlestick was burning in

the window-sill, and by its light he could see that the room bore an appearance of disturbance which had not been two days ago. Piles of dark green volumes covered the table and even littered the chairs, while the shelves by the wall were all but empty. On the only unencumbered chair Miss McCrie was sitting with an open volume before her, with which she had evidently been occupied. At this moment operations seemed to have been suspended, the pencil lay idle before her, and with her right elbow on the table, she was resting her head on her hand.

At the sound of the opening door she started and looked up. Seeing Bernard, she sprang to her feet and—but Bernard was not quite sure of this—stuffed back her handkerchief into her pocket. It almost seemed to him as though her eyelids were a little red, but there was no leisure for making observations, for Miss McCrie began to talk much and fast, evidently deeply annoyed at having been discovered in an attitude that might suggest dejection.

"Mr. Berrincott! You here? Has anything happened? Please tell me that nothing has happened to Marian. You caught me in a weak moment just now; it was only an hour ago that I came back from poor Jeremias's funeral, and of course the house feels very empty. It isn't my way to despond, but he was such a faithful servant, and quite perfect except for his drinking. Tell me whether anything has happened?"

"Nothing has happened, but I have come back to examine the death register once more. I hope I am not in the way; you look as though you were having a cleaning."

Miss McCrie looked at him attentively for some seconds across the piles of green volumes.

"You have come back to examine the death registers. Does that mean that Marian has told you?"

"Marian has told me nothing; I know nothing at all; but I wish to see the entry of Caroline Berrincott's death once more. I believe there is some mistake about it."

"I cannot show you the entry," said Miss McCrie calmly, "because it no longer exists, but I can show you the place

where it was." And she turned to one of the volumes on a chair.

Bernard watched her with a feeling of increasing bewilderment until presently she had found what she wanted.

"You will see that there is no page forty-seven in this volume," she said, pushing the book towards him, "and it was on page forty-seven that Caroline Berrincott's death was recorded."

"And what has become of the page?"

"I tore it out of the book myself this afternoon, not three hours ago."

Bernard, with the open volume in his hand, looked at her, waiting for more. It was evident that more was coming. Miss McCrie was watching the effect of her words on his face with something of an inimical expression on her own.

"The entry had been tampered with and there was danger of discovery," she resumed in her usual business-like tone. "The new inspector appeared unexpectedly. New inspectors are generally more troublesome than old ones; they want to show their zeal. This one is suspicion personified. He pounced upon me as I was looking up the very entry in question, and thrust his nose into pretty nearly every volume. Several dates were found fault with, several entries criticised, every single slip of the pen aroused his misgivings, every ink-blot looked to him as though it were hiding some secret much blacker than itself. As a rule, the old registers on the shelves are left in peace, but there had been no time to put the Death Register of '59 out of the way. I tried to keep his attention off it, and this was probably how I called his attention to it. It was all I could do to create an opportunity of getting behind his back for a minute, and the rest was easy enough."

"You tore out the page in cold blood, under the inspector's eyes?"

"Not under his eyes; behind his back, as I tell you. There was nothing between that and discovery; no one accustomed to registers could have looked at it and not seen that something was wrong."

"And was the page not missed? What explanation did you give?"

Miss McCrie shrugged her thin shoulders.

"An accident. What else could I say but an accident? Whether it satisfied Mr. Burton or not remains to be seen. I think it rather relieved him to have something to report," and a humorous twinkle appeared in her eye. She was quite herself again by this time, brisk, determined, and without any trace of that rare dejection which had surprised her so un-awares.

"What made you run this risk?"

"That is my own concern," said the old maid, while her withered cheeks blushed as scarlet as though she had pronounced her lover's name.

Bernard looked at her with a piercing glance.

"You know more than you have told me, Miss McCrie. You know who altered the date."

Miss McCrie drummed with her fingers on the nearest volume and made no reply.

"Was it Marian?"

She pushed the volume from her, and raised her head with a jerk, as though having come to some decision.

"You are right, Mr. Berrincott. I know more than I have told you, more than I have any right to tell you, perhaps, but I am not a good hand at fine cases of conscience. It can only have been Providence that sent you back here to-night, and if I die for it you shall know the truth."

"Was it Marian?" repeated Bernard.

"Yes, it was Marian."

He had almost expected the answer, and yet he felt the colour mounting to his forehead.

"And her motive?"

But Miss McCrie's powers of self-restraint were at an end.

"Her motive?" she repeated, bursting into a somewhat cracked laugh, which somehow at this moment relieved her stormy emotions more than any words could have done. "Oh, blind, blind men! Her motive was to save you from an unpleasant discovery; she *believed*, poor innocent child, that

by altering that one date she was saving you. Have you never guessed that she loves you?"

"I am her cousin," said Bernard, unsteadily.

"Her cousin—pooh! You are her world, her idol, her everything; though how you have come to be that," added Miss McCrie, with unwonted sharpness, "is more than I can tell."

"And you tell me that she did it in cold blood for my sake, for my sake alone—are you quite sure?"

"I tell you that she loves you with a love which few women can give, and which, according to my private opinion, no mortal man deserves. You wanted to hear the truth, Mr. Berrincott; well, you shall have it, and in plain words, too, since there's no harm in an old woman speaking her mind freely. Excuse me for saying it, but you're a blockhead, Mr. Berrincott; no one but a blockhead could go hunting after fine young ladies who drive in carriages and wear cream-coloured dresses, and meanwhile overlook this priceless treasure at his feet. I have never seen your bride-elect, but I can tell you without setting eyes on her that she will never make the wife to you that Marian would have made."

It was with an almost spiteful intonation that Miss McCrie referred to the bride-elect. She had been feeling very sore upon this subject ever since she realized that that unknown girl was usurping the place which should by rights have belonged to her favourite, Marian.

"But how could I guess that my little cousin——" began Bernard. It was the first time in his life that he had been called a blockhead to his face, and he felt just a little staggered.

"Little cousin, indeed!" almost snorted Miss McCrie. "Does it not strike you that this 'little cousin' of yours is capable of rather big things? It is time, surely, that you should give up treating her as though she were in the nursery. Why, it was all I could do to prevent her giving herself up to the police, for fear of *you* being suspected. I am violating confidences, of course; but you must, you shall know what a prize you have spurned."

And Miss McCrie proceeded to give him a brief and brisk outline of the interview under the nutmeg trees.

"Do you know of any other woman," she wound up, "who would have made that three into a two, merely in order that you should keep your name and your money? Do you imagine that your Sylvia, or Sybil, or whatever the creature's name is, would have run the risk for your sake?"

Bernard groaned to himself. He knew that she would not. He was sitting now beside the table with his face buried in his arms, while the torrent of Miss McCrie's indignation rolled over his head. Never in his life had he had such a dose of truth as this, and he felt aware that he had not a single word to say in reply. The discovery of Marian's love overwhelmed him so completely that his mind had scarcely as yet begun to occupy itself with the other things that were to follow. The greatness of that unsuspected love made him feel so small, so pitifully small! How was he ever to pay her back this debt, whose hugeness seemed to himself at this moment to be weighing him to the ground?

"For one of the fortunates of the earth like you," said Miss McCrie, who seemed inclined to spare him nothing, "who, besides their money and their name, happen also to have a straight back and a tolerable face, no doubt nothing is easier than to go about enjoying life and breaking hearts at every turn."

"But am I a fortunate of the earth?" asked Bernard, suddenly raising his head. "If that two really was a three, I have got neither a name nor a penny."

"That is true," said Miss McCrie, reflectively. "I hadn't quite realised that." And immediately her excitement calmed down and a spark of sympathy sprang into the eyes fixed on him. "I had meant to lecture you on the dangers of riches," she added in her usual tone, "but perhaps I had better defer my sermon until the other registers have been examined."

"Thank you. I suppose I had better lose no time about it."

Bernard rose to his feet with the air of a man who is not quite sure as to whether he is on his head or on his heels.

"Of course I have put off starting till next mail, but I shall

see you again before then. I should like you not to think quite so badly of me, Miss McCrie, but I can't find the words now; by the time I come back things will be a bit clearer, no doubt. I think I had better get out of the way now. Good night."

And he first snatched at her hand and then quickly left the room. For fully two minutes Miss McCrie stood and looked at the door by which he had gone out.

"He is a wretch, of course," she said between her teeth, "but he bears it pluckily, poor boy. I wonder how it will end!"

In spite of herself her heart was beginning to be softened towards him. She fell to asking herself now whether, after all, it might yet be possible to forgive him for not loving Marian?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"GOING—GOING—GONE!"

WAS his father aware of having committed bigamy? This was the question which ceaselessly occupied Bernard after he had examined the Pamphlet Book and the Parish Register, in both of which he had found it recorded that Caroline Berrincott had died on the thirtieth day of June, of the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-nine. At first sight there seemed no possibility of ever obtaining clearness on this point, and yet the future was to bring an answer even to this question.

The truth was that Simon Berrincott had died ignorant of the wrong he had done.

Once again a chain of intricate circumstances of seemingly insignificant details had led to a momentous result. It had been more or less unawares that Simon had slipped into the rôle of a widower. Being dead-tired of his wife and bothered by the inquisitiveness of his friends, who wanted to know why he did not bring her home, it had occurred to him as the

most convenient way out of the difficulty to say that she was dead, more particularly as in saying this he was only slightly anticipating events, since even now she could scarcely be said to be living, but only lingering on, and was almost quite sure to be dead in a few months. So persistently, however, did Caroline Berrincott linger on, that when the elder Berrincott, feeling his own end near, called upon his son to marry the daughter of his old friend Ingram, Simon had been playing the part of widower—and thoroughly enjoying it too—for more than a year. And now for the first time it struck him that the little comedy on which he had embarked so light-heartedly might possibly take an awkward turn. His father was pressing him hard; there was evidently no escape for him except by telling the truth, and this he decided to put off till the last extremity. The mere idea of all the fuss and moralizing and inconvenience that would ensue from his confession was enough to make the easy-going Simon shudder and shut his eyes. He therefore did what was the least troublesome at the moment—he allowed himself to get engaged to Miss Ingram. Perhaps something would turn up before June, when the wedding was to be. This seemed all the more likely, as in a letter received about the middle of May from Joseph Silkworth, the West Indian manager—it had always been Simon who had managed the affairs of Lot 13 for his invalid father—the conviction had been expressed that Mrs. Berrincott would not last for another month. This letter likewise contained a request. Mr. Silkworth began by respectfully announcing that he was about to unite his lot to that of a young lady called Lizzie Fairworth; then there followed some remarks as to the limited accommodation which the Little House presented to a married couple, culminating in the plain question as to whether Mr. Simon would have any objection to Mrs. Simon being moved from the Big House into the little one—supposing that she should manage after all to last till June, for it appeared that the wedding days of servant and master had been fixed for about the same time.

Simon himself would have seen no objection to the arrangement had it not been for a letter of tearful complaint which

the same mail brought him from the sick Caroline. As the new-made *fiancé* of Miss Ingram, he was feeling particularly guilty towards his wife, and the result was that the return mail took two letters to Lot 13, a soothing one to Caroline and a severe one to Joseph Silkworth, in which he was told that he could have the Big House the very day after Mrs. Berrin-cott's death, but not an hour before it.

There now followed some uncomfortable weeks for Simon. Two mails came without bringing him the news of his liberty; twice his wedding-day had been fixed and twice he had managed to have it deferred. He was beginning to be near his wits' end, when on June 26th the following letter reached his hands:

"LOT 13, *June 3, 1859.*

"HONOURED SIR: I have run myself so close with the time that it is all I can do to put these lines to paper. The reason that I had deferred writing was that I had expected" [he had begun to write "hoped" and then scratched it out hastily] "to be able to convey to you by this mail the news of Mrs. Simon's death. Doctor Garnet, who is attending her, did not expect her to see the night. He declares a revival to be quite out of the question this time. The agony has indeed already begun. I shall keep this letter open till the last possible moment.

"Your obedient servant,

"JOSEPH SILK WORTH.

"P. S. I have just sent over to the Big House, and am told that she is still breathing. Doctor Garnet thinks she may hold hold out till morning, but more likely the end will come before midnight. In any case Mrs. Simon is a dead woman by the time this letter reaches your hands."

Three days later Simon's wedding took place, he having, on the strength of the above letter, decided to risk it. And yet, although his mind was almost quite at rest, he was aware of waiting rather impatiently for the next mail. It came empty-handed, bringing from St. Clare no news either of Caroline or of sugar-canes. Puzzled and a little anxious, he despatched a

sharp epistle to the manager, calling upon him to state by return of post on which day Mrs. Berrincott had died. The answer came brimming with the most abject apologies—it had been the first ecstasies of the honeymoon which had caused mail day to be missed—and announcing that Mrs. Simon had breathed her last upon June 18th, having, contrary to Doctor Garnet's expectations, revived for another ten days.

It was with a big breath of relief that Simon pushed the letter back into its cover.

"Enjoying his honeymoon, has he been, the wretch," he muttered, "and spoiling mine for me by keeping me on thorns. Well, well, all's well that ends well—eleven days to spare."

And from that day forward Lot 13—which after his second marriage he gave up visiting—became for him no more than a spot from which monthly reports reached him as to the state of the canes, and as the years rolled on, his very memory of the brief period of wedded life which he had spent in the shadow of cocoanut palms became to him as unreal as the images of the palm-trees themselves.

Of all this, of course, Bernard knew nothing. All that he was aware of as yet, while he kicked his heels in Williamstown waiting for the next mail, was that his name, according to English law, was not Bernard Berrincott, but Bernard Ingram—this latter having been his mother's name; also that Thornton would now pass to the next heir—in other words, to his Uncle James.

For his own future he had formed no plan as yet, except that nothing would induce him to stay in England, although it was unavoidable to visit it for the winding up of affairs. Besides, even had it not been unavoidable, he knew that if he was to start on his new life with anything like peace of mind he must attempt to clear up some of the mystery attached to the old. It was, after all, possible that among his father's old papers at Thornton some clue would be found which might guide him to daylight.

Two days before mail-day Bernard made his last expedition to windward. It was an expedition to Cane Hill, for he

did not wish to leave the island without seeing Miss McCrie once more.

The day was brilliant and windy—more than usually brilliant, and more than usually windy—and Bernard, drawing up in front of Cane Hill house, was surprised to see several dozen people of various shades of colour collected round the door step and swarming up and down the grass bank, while a gigantic mulatto, standing upon what seemed to him to be the dining-room table, waved some indistinguishable object above his head and shouted something in a stentorian voice. Having mounted the bank, he perceived the object in the mulatto's hand to be a carved sandal-wood box, and the words that were being shouted he distinguished as :

"One shilling and tenpence, Ladies and Gentlemen—going for one shilling and tenpence—going—going—*gone!*"

An auction? Was that what was going on? And what could it mean? And where was Miss McCrie? Bernard looked about him in astonishment. It seemed to him that the whole of the furniture and most of the other belongings of the house had been collected on the top of the bank. He recognised several of the Chippendale tables that stood in the drawing-room upstairs; and he caught sight of one of the old cabinets being lugged up on to a cart down on the road by a knot of chattering negroes. The scene would have been lively enough without the wind and the sun to enhance the details, for the former caught hold of every scrap of drapery as well as of all the gaudy aprons and head-cloths in the crowd, and turned them into fluttering signals of distress, and the latter flashed back from the handles of the silver spoons which the mulatto was now bringing to the notice of the public, and struck sparks from every bit of glass and crockery that stood about waiting for its turn. Before a couple of cracked mirrors leaning against the wall, half-a-dozen ragamuffins were dancing with hands joined, grinning gleefully at their own black faces.

It seemed that nothing was to escape the hammer. Bernard, having stood for some minutes watching the scene in amazement, stooped to pick up a paper that the wind had car-

ried to his feet—it was an old song, very limp and ragged, and with the name “Nelly” written on it in faded ink.

Having made his way round the house, he entered by a side door and went in search of Miss McCrie. In the dining-room, whose door he opened first, he was greeted by four naked walls. Every one of the dark green volumes which he had seen here last had vanished. He opened several other doors and was met by a great many more naked walls, but of Miss McCrie there was no trace downstairs. It was in the drawing-room that he found her at last, walking briskly up and down, with her hands tightly clasped behind her back and her mouth drooping more than usual at the corners. There was not a chair remaining in the room, which undoubtedly was one of the reasons for her walking up and down, but even had there been half-a-dozen chairs available, it is probable that Miss McCrie would not have sat down, but would have preferred to keep up her breathless walk, stopping only every now and then in order to throw a glance out of the window at the doings below. Here also the walls were bare, the sea-green colour which had once adorned them showing in faint green squares wherever it had been shielded by a picture now removed.

“Miss McCrie !” broke out Bernard, unheeding of any more conventional greeting. “Tell me, for Heaven’s sake, what this all means ?”

“It means that I am going away,” said Miss McCrie, standing still.

“Going away ? But why ? Where to ? And why are you not taking any of your things with you ?”

“Because I need money.”

“As badly as all that ?” escaped from Bernard’s lips before he had time to stop it. He was thinking of that song that had fluttered to his feet. “You certainly do things thoroughly when you are about it,” he added quickly. “This is the most complete clearing-out I have ever heard of.”

The matter looked so serious that evidently the best thing to do was to treat it as lightly as possible.

“The look of the dining-room quite gave me a turn ; surely

the register books have not gone the way of the tables and chairs?" and he tried to laugh.

"The registry books? Which registry books?" Miss McCrie was beginning, and then with an exclamation darted off to the nearest window. "It is the piano now," she said with something of a gulp. "Poor Nelly's piano."

"A splendid instrument, ladies and gentlemen," was heard from below. "Who will give more than nine and sixpence for this truly elegant object?"

"But it not make music," objected a voice in the crowd.

"That is not true," said Miss McCrie, just above her breath. "It is only a little hoarse in damp weather, and that only because it was unluckily swamped on the coast when it came to the house twenty-five years ago, and the salt water got into the cords."

She gave one long look at the piano, and then turned resolutely from the window.

"You were asking me about the registers. I have got nothing more to do with registers. I handed over the books to the governor a week ago."

"But I don't understand—for what reason?"

"Mr. Burton. I told you that I thought it rather relieved him to have something to report; it was an outlet to his red-hot zeal, and, as the governor happens to be an old enemy of mine, it turned out that a mutilated register was enough to kill me as registrar general. Don't look so dismal, Mr. Berrincott, for pity's sake, the loss isn't so awful. My pay used only to be sixty-five pounds."

"And what else have you got to live on besides those sixty-five pounds?" asked Bernard bluntly.

Miss McCrie flushed scarlet, in the way she had flushed the other evening.

"Oh, it isn't easy to starve in the tropics," she replied evasively. "And, besides, the sale will bring in something, I suppose." And she walked back again to the window.

Bernard, following more slowly, saw that the piano had been disposed of—probably to somebody who would use it as a sideboard, or a washing table—and that the auctioneer

was unpacking something white and strange-looking out of a box.

"The skeleton," said Miss McCrie, with a quick sigh, "Harry's skeleton. I would have offered it to Doctor O'Lynn, but he is away."

Meanwhile the mulatto's glib tongue was running over a list of the advantages which are bound to accrue to every household by the possession of a skeleton, as well as the commendable points of this skeleton in particular, which, as it turned out, was short of only two ribs and one finger, and all the time the wind was making the skeleton dance merrily on the table to the music of its own rattling bones.

When Miss McCrie turned from the window this time she found Bernard's eyes fixed upon her.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"To live as best I can, I am leaving this house because I don't think I could bear to live in it without the things; I have been offered an empty house, which is smaller, down by the sea. Di goes with me, and that is really all I want."

"But this is rubbish," burst out Bernard. "You must let me help you, Miss McCrie."

"You?" was all that Miss McCrie said, but the stress she laid upon the word brought Bernard to his senses.

"To be sure, I'm a duffer," and he struck himself on his forehead.

Bernard took a turn up and down the room, and then stood still before Miss McCrie.

"If I still was one of the fortunates of the earth, as you put it the other night when you gave it me so roundly," he said, trying to smile, "nothing would have stopped me from helping you. But one of my objects in coming here to-day was to tell you that my pockets are empty. I see, however, that you know everything. We're in the same boat, Miss McCrie."

"Yes, I know everything," and now the gray eyes were fastened keenly on his face. "But you are not the same person who was here the other night. Do you know that you have grown quite ten years older in these ten days? Tell me, does *she* know?"

"Of course she does. Mr. Durrant must have got my second cable message long ago."

"And what will she do?"

"Do?" repeated Bernard, impatiently. "Surely she has got no choice in the matter. What else can she do but obey her father?" And he looked at Miss McCrie as though challenging her to declare that there was anything else *for* Sybil to do.

"Then you don't think she will stick to you?"

"No," said Bernard briefly and almost bitterly this time.

"I feel for you very much," Miss McCrie assured him in a far milder tone. Somehow she felt much more kindly towards Bernard since she knew that he was a free man. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Berrincott," it suddenly occurred to her to say.

"On what?" asked Bernard, looking round him.

It ended by Miss McCrie and Bernard sitting down side by side on two overturned packing-cases and spending the next hour in a friendly chat, the pauses of which were filled by the stentorian "going—going—gone!" of the auctioneer below, which came bobbing up to the surface with the persistency of a cork.

"I should say that pretty nearly everything must be "gone" by this time," remarked Bernard at last.

"Not quite everything. There is one thing more to come, and that will be the worst of all. I am not sure that I can bear to be so near," and Miss McCrie's eyes filled suddenly with tears.

Bernard got up and looked out of the window. The auctioneer was getting down from the table which had served him as pedestal, while round the corner of the house a negro appeared leading a wicked-looking yellow horse, which lifted its feet as though it were stepping on red-hot coals.

Bernard thought he heard a faint rustle behind him, but he did not notice that Miss McCrie was looking over his shoulder.

"The last object to be disposed of, ladies and gentlemen," announced the mulatto with an introductory wave towards

The Mosquito. "Finest horse on the island, never been known to make a stumble, intelligent as a dog, gentle as a lamb—that's only a little natural liveliness," as The Mosquito reared up so straight as all but to capsize his attendant, while the more nervous members of the crowd prudently drew back a little.

"Time is too short, ladies and gentlemen, for the enumeration of all the virtues possessed by this noble animal. Though capable of carrying the stoutest gentleman on the island over the highest hill that ever was scaled, a child would yet ride him with ease and——"

But what other virtues the noble animal possessed was never clearly known, for at that very moment the first shriek was heard in the crowd. The Mosquito had managed by a skilful wrench to get his head free, and was now plunging about at liberty, with an expression of such diabolical wickedness in the whites of his eyes that some of the men and all the women and children flew terror-stricken down the bank, and dispersed precipitately in all directions.

This time it was a sob which Bernard heard behind him. He looked round just in time to see Miss McCrie running from the room with her handkerchief held before her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO TELEGRAMS.

It was one day towards the end of March that Mrs. Durrant said to her daughter :

"Don't forget that you are to put on your new pink dress to-night. Sir Norman Vallington is coming to dinner. And if he wants to sing, as he usually does, of course you will accompany him."

"Yes, mamma," said Sybil, and then she hesitated for a moment and actually blushed a little as she bent over her needle-work.

"Papa was saying this morning that the telegram from St. Clare was due by this time."

Mrs. Durrant scanned her daughter's face with eyes that looked drowsy but were not so.

"So it is. But that is no reason for not putting on the pink silk, or not playing Sir Norman's accompaniments. That telegram has not yet been read, you know."

"That is true enough," said Sybil to herself, drooping her beautiful head with the ghost of a sigh.

The last three weeks had been rather trying, even to Sybil's nerves, for she really was fond of Bernard, at least such was her impression, although she would not permit herself even to look in that direction so long as everything was not perfectly cleared up. The position of an engaged young lady, who was yet not engaged, would have been trying enough, even without Sir Norman Vallington, whom as yet Mrs. Durrant kept indeed at arm's length, though never further off than that, and in whom Sybil thought to see her fate, in the event of the news from St. Clare turning out unfavourable. Sir Norman was small and sickly, and whenever Sybil thought of the possibility of that telegram not bringing the expected "All right," she could not repress a slight shudder in the midst of the general feeling of depression. To assert that either her sleep or her appetite were affected by the suspense would be an insult to Sybil's constitution, both mental and physical; her mind was far too well balanced to admit of such disturbances, and yet she could not remember ever having come so near to feeling excited as during these last three weeks. Sybil, to do her justice, would have been quite willing to marry Bernard, even without his name and his fortune, for she was too apathetic to be ambitious, and as for the fortune, she knew that even as the wife of a poor man she could enjoy all the comforts to which she was used, since she had money enough for two. If she looked for that telegram with something that almost resembled eagerness, it was because she knew that she would not have the strength to resist her mother's will. Her three elder sisters had all bowed before that awful will, and she was not stronger, rather weaker, than they were. One of them

only, the strongest of them and the third in age, Gertrude, had attempted to rebel. The scenes which had preceded Gertrude's engagement still lived in Sybil's memory as one of the most painful reminiscences of her childhood. She had been nine years old at the time, and, though eight years younger than Gertrude, had always been more or less in her elder sister's confidence. When first Lord Mallot had been mentioned as a possible husband for Gertrude, Gertrude had said to her younger sister, with a scornful toss of her spirited little head :

"Lord Mallot, indeed ! Have you seen him ? I'd as soon marry a gorilla."

It was not long after this that on a stormy November day matters came to a crisis. On the evening before, Gertrude, already in her dinner-dress, had slipped off to the old nursery where Sybil still slept.

"Lord Mallot is coming to-morrow," she told her, "and mamma thinks I am going to marry him, but I am not. He is a terrible man." And she tossed her head again, but not with quite as much spirit as last time, and even the nine-years-old Sybil seemed to read something like fear in her black eyes.

Next day the house was in a state of badly suppressed excitement. All day long there had been interviews going on with closed doors, and several times Gertrude was sent for, either to the drawing-room or to the library, and at luncheon all faces were very grave, and Gertrude did not appear. All day long, too, the wind howled in the chimneys and moaned round the corners, and whirled clouds of withered leaves past the windows. Once Sybil caught sight of her sister on the staircase with red eyelids, but she was chained to governess and lesson books, and, though she could not help feeling that something of importance was brooding in the air, yet she had no means of keeping pace with events. The storm outside seemed so entirely to be part of the agitation within, that when a door banged anywhere in the house it was a question whether the wind had done it or whether it marked the closing of a peculiarly stormy interview. Sybil never could hear the wind in the chimney without being reminded of that day.

Next morning she was awakened by a hand on her shoul-

der, and started up to see Gertrude standing beside her bed with her long black hair flowing over her white dressing-gown. She was a beautiful figure all in black and white, for her face too was quite white. The only speck of colour about her was the ruby in the ring which she wore on her left hand. It was her engagement ring ; for she had come to tell her sister that she had got engaged to Lord Mallot last night. At first Sybil had scarcely comprehended what she was saying. She had started out of the deepest sleep, and it seemed to her to be the middle of the night, for, owing to the masses of brown leaves with which the storm had plastered over both windows of the nursery, the room was all but dark now at eight o'clock.

"But you said you would never marry him," she remarked at last, when she had collected her senses. "You said he was a terrible man."

"Yes, but mamma is more terrible," Gertrude had replied in a frightened whisper, as she stooped to kiss her little sister, and then swept from the room, leaving Sybil sitting bolt upright in bed in the half-dark nursery, staring after the slender white figure, and trembling as she knew not what.

On the evening of the day on which Mrs. Durrant had reminded her daughter that Sir Norman Vallington was coming to dinner, Sybil put on her pink silk, as she had been told. Sir Norman came, and evidently was of opinion that pink silk was most becoming to Miss Durrant.

During dinner a telegram was brought to Mr. Durrant, but he looked so calm and dignified, both before reading it and after reading it, that Sybil grew no wiser from looking at his face. As the ladies were leaving the dining-room she noticed that her father put a piece of paper into her mother's hand as she passed him, but the chances of learning anything from Mrs. Durrant's expression were, as she knew, simply non-existent. She saw her mother take the paper drowsily, drowsily read it, and drowsily put it into her pocket, after which she continued her drowsy conversation with the lady next her. It was only later on, after the gentlemen had joined the ladies, that Sybil had an unexpected chance of enlightenment. As Mrs. Durrant had foreseen, Sir Norman Vallington was

anxious to sing, and, the question of accompaniment having arisen, he looked enquiringly towards Miss Durrant. To everyone's astonishment, however, and to Sir Norman's bitter disappointment, Mrs. Durrant offered to accompany him herself. Then Sybil knew without fail that the telegram contained the expected "All right."

When the guests were all gone she was told the news in so many words, being informed by her father, in her mother's presence, that she might from this moment forward consider herself engaged to Mr. Berrincott. It was a relief to get to her room at last, for the evening had been a long one, and she was feeling distinctly agitated. Catching sight of herself in her toilet-mirror, she was quite astonished to see how bright her eyes were looking. Yes, now that she came to think of it, she supposed that she must, after all, be what people called "in love." And what a comfort it was to be able to yield to her feelings with her parents' full consent and approval; and it was an undeniable comfort, too, that Bernard's fortune was all safe, for it stood to reason—to Sybil's reason, at least—that the more money they had the pleasanter their life would be.

During three whole days The Monastery was in a state of high satisfaction. Mr. Durrant walked about, and rubbed his hands a good deal; Mrs. Durrant watched her daughter approvingly, and Sybil looked serene and beautiful; even from Mrs. Durrant's heart the St. Clare telegram had caused a stone to fall—as the German's put it—for although there was no denying that "Lady Vallington" sounds better than "Mrs. Berrincott," yet, for the sake of seeing Sybil look as serene as this, she was mother enough to sacrifice without a murmur the prospect of one more titled son-in-law, more particularly as in that part of England the name of Berrincott had quite as good a sound as that of Vallington.

"I have been told that the family is even more ancient," she remarked to her daughter on the evening of the third day after the arrival of the telegram.

Mother and daughter were sitting before the fire in the April twilight and waiting for the dressing-gong. Sometimes Sybil asked a question or made a remark at which her mother

smiled sleepily but good-naturedly, for Sybil was rather more talkative as well as rather more confidential than usual.

"I think you are happy," said Mrs. Durrant, after a pause, during which she had been continually contemplating her daughter's profile.

"Yes," said Sybil, raising her calm eyes from the fire, "I am happy."

"And so am I," was Mrs. Durrant's inward reflection.

How could either mother or daughter know that at that very moment the telegraph boy was already half way up the avenue, bearing in his hand a yellow envelope exactly similar to the one he had brought to the house three days ago?

Of this Mrs. Durrant was in blissful ignorance. Sybil was the first of her four daughters from whom she had heard the words, "I am happy"; and, hearing them, she could not fail to realize how much pleasanter it was that matters should have taken this turn, and what a trouble it would have been to have the episode of Gertrude's engagement repeat itself, though, to be sure, Sybil was much less troublesome to manage than Gertrude had been.

"Of course Miles will go with me to Thornton," was Sybil's next remark, after studying the fire for another few minutes.

"Of course," agreed her mother. "She understands your hair perfectly, and, besides, you are accustomed to her."

If it had not been for some early primroses which the telegraph boy had spied through the twilight, and had just then stopped to gather, the yellow envelope ought by rights to have been in Mr. Durrant's hands by this time. Thanks to those primroses, however, both mother and daughter had gained a few minutes' respite. The sleepy smile was still on Mrs. Durrant's lips; she was saying to herself that now she could die in peace, since her task in the world was accomplished. Four daughters all married to eligible husbands—was it not a work of which any mother might be proud?

She was still saying so to herself, when, in place of the expected gong, there came a ring at the front door.

"Too late for a visitor," she remarked; "it is probably a message from a neighbour."

Five minutes later a step was heard in the gallery which sounded like Mr. Durrant's step, except that it was unusually rapid. He entered the room with an open telegram in his hand, and with a face which also seemed not to be quite his own face. Sybil, at least, had never seen his eyes so wide open or his lips so pale.

"This is the end, I suppose," he said, putting the telegram into his wife's hand.

She looked at his face, and then bent forward so that the firelight fell on the paper, for the room was rapidly growing dark.

It took her a long time to read the message, either because of the uncertain light or because she spelled it out several times over.

"Yes, of course, this is the end," she said slowly, when at last she had done.

She looked across at her daughter as she spoke, and Sybil, who had been watching her with a strange feeling of uneasiness, was almost frightened by the change in her expression. That good-natured smile which her face had worn during the last three days had disappeared within a minute, and was replaced by the old hard grooves about the mouth which Sybil knew so well. She did not know yet what had happened, but she felt the blood slowly leaving her face.

To herself Mrs. Durrant was saying :

"What a blessing, to be sure, that the engagement has not been made public!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FIRST GOOD-BYE.

ON his return to England Bernard went to Thornton for a few days—for as few days as he could manage, since he knew himself to be there as his uncle's guest. He had to say good-bye to the old place. It was the only good-bye which he would be able to say, as he knew very well, for of course an

interview with Sybil would never be permitted, deeply as he yearned for one more sight of that beautiful face to carry with him as a memory through life. No doubt he could take farewell of Marian, if he chose, but, strangely enough, each time he thought of this his courage failed him. Over and over again he had tried to picture to himself what a meeting between him and Marian could be like—certainly most unlike anything that had ever gone before, for, since that evening at Cane Hill when he had sat beside the dining-room table with his face buried in his arms, his cousin had become to him a different woman. To meet her again would be like meeting a stranger. He shrank from the prospect, and yet he returned to it persistently, for so strong a hold upon his imagination had the new Marian taken, that, despite the fresh wound in his heart of which he was not aware that it had even begun to cicatrise, his thoughts during these days were almost as busy with his cousin as they were with Sybil.

Bernard's hopes with regard to his father's old papers had not been quite vain, for after a laborious hunt he brought to daylight the letter written by Joseph Silkworth in reply to Simon's letter of enquiry, and in which it was clearly stated that Caroline Berrincott had died on June 18th. His father had therefore not been aware of committing bigamy; the question weighing on Bernard's mind was answered; but another had arisen on its heels: what could possibly have been Joseph Silkworth's motive in quoting an incorrect date, and very likely also falsifying a certificate, for whether the manager had supported his assertion by any more forcible means Bernard had of course no chance of ascertaining. The only person who might possibly know more was Mr. Silkworth junior, who was established, as Bernard had been told, on The Monastery estate. Should he send for the man? That meant delay, a thing for which Bernard never had any patience. The matter ended by his putting on his hat and starting for Mr. Silkworth's dwelling within the same half hour that had brought to light the West Indian letter.

It was one of the earliest days of May, and the trees were very fairly green already, though to Bernard's eye they

looked lamentably bare beside the St. Clara mangoes and bread-fruit trees.

He stepped out sturdily until The Monastery boundaries were crossed, and then unconsciously he began to hang back a little and to glance guiltily about him. Strictly speaking he had no right to be there, and he knew it. The brief and final interview which had taken place between him and Mr. Durrant had virtually closed the gates of The Monastery upon him; but, in the first place, he was not going near the house; and, in the second place, he had been told that the family had already started for London. And yet, in spite of everything, Bernard could not keep himself from looking expectantly into the tree shadows, and from casting an enquiring glance over every scrap of cowslip-sprinkled meadow across which his path led him.

The ex-manager of Lot 13 was supposed to be taking charge of the accounts of The Monastery estate. Bernard found him in the cottage in which he had been installed, shivering before a roaring fire and with a plaid wrapped round his legs. He was sulky and uncommunicative; sulky because he bore Bernard a grudge for having cheated him of the gold mine which ought to have made his fortune, and uncommunicative because he knew nothing. If Joseph had said in his letter that Mrs. Simon had died on June 18th, then Joseph had told a lie—that much he could assert; but what reasons Joseph had had for fibbing he was blest if he knew. If he remembered rightly, it must have been somewhere about the 18th that they carried her over from the Big House to the Little House, just a couple of days before Joseph's wedding day.

"And I suppose there is no one else alive who is likely to know the whole story," said Bernard, rising to go.

"I suppose not," growled Mr. Silkworth. Then, after a moment, he added half unwillingly, "Of course, there's Lizzie."

"Who is Lizzie?"

"Joseph's widow. She's alive, I believe; at least I've never heard of her being dead. She's too bad a lot, anyway, to have

died young. But it comes to much the same, since, even supposing I wanted to ever so much, I couldn't possibly tell you which of the islands she's gallivanting on at present. It's not St. Clara; that's all I know."

Joseph Silkworth's widow alive—here certainly was an unlooked-for chance of clearing up all that remained dark in the history of the past. As Bernard turned his face homewards he was busy already with the idea of writing to Miss McCrie and begging her to institute inquiries after the missing Lizzie Silkworth. So preoccupied was he with his new train of thought, that he had almost reached the middle of one of the stretches of grass which lay on his way before he noticed that the meadow was no longer as deserted as it had been half an hour ago.

With something of a start he looked about him; he had almost forgotten that he still was on The Monastery grounds. At a little distance from him two people with their backs towards him were gathering flowers. Owing to the dazzle of sunlight in his eyes he could not distinguish details, though he saw that they were both women. Immediately everything else vanished from his mind; his heart began to beat unbearably, and he pressed forward with straining eyes. One of the figures was in a dark, the other in a light, dress; but whether either of them was tall and stately it was hard to discern, seeing that both were bent almost double, and both were plucking cowslips as though for a wager. A big basket overflowing with the yellow flowers as with liquid gold stood on the grass. These things Bernard distinguished as he drew nearer. Then one of the figures straightened itself—the one in the light dress—and, alas! it was short and stumpy. But in the same minute the darkly-clad figure stood upright, and Bernard found himself face to face with Sybil Durrant standing ankle-deep in the waving May grass and with both her hands full of cowslips.

She looked so beautiful in her close-fitting dark green dress, and with the flush of exertion on her face, that his first impulse was to wonder how he ever could have been fool enough to think that he could give her up. What was it that

Miss McCrie had hinted at in her questions? Was it, after all, quite outside the bounds of possibility that Sybil should "stick to him," as the old maid had bluntly put it? Had not other girls stuck to the man they loved, and ended by overcoming even the opposition of ambitious parents?

It was but a passing flash of insane hope. In the next instant already he had recovered his senses sufficiently to say almost quite soberly:

"Good evening, Miss Durrant. What a fine show of cowslips!"

The cowslips were a great blessing at that moment, and so was the stumpy light grey figure, without whose presence he knew that he would probably have lost his head to the point of making a fool of himself.

"I thought you had gone to London," he said, as Sybil did not immediately answer, for he felt that speaking was safer than holding one's tongue.

Sybil had likewise recovered herself by this time. She had flushed scarlet in the first instant, but there was scarcely a break in the smooth, rich voice as she answered:

"We were to have gone to London yesterday, but mamma had caught cold, and it was put off till to-morrow."

"And are all these cowslips going to London too?"

"Yes, mamma sent me to gather them. She is very particular about the flowers for the dinner table, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Bernard imprudently. "You were arranging flowers for the dinner table when I first saw you last year."

"Of course one can buy flowers in London," went on Sybil rather more quickly, "but mamma fancies that cowslips would make more effect than the regular town flowers, so she thought it would be a good plan to take a hamperful up with us, especially as they cost nothing; mamma is always so practical. This is the best cowslip meadow about here."

There could be no doubt upon this point at least. If on every bough of every tree around an imp had been perched and pelted this stretch of green with golden balls, the grass

could not have been more thickly set with the yellow flower heads.

"And was it to help you carry the basket that your mamma sent your maid with you?" asked Bernard, glancing towards the stumpy grey woman who was gathering cowslips at a discreet distance.

"Miles? Oh, Miles has always been walking with me lately. That is to say——"

"That is to say, since I came back to Thornton," finished Bernard on another imprudent impulse. "You can tell your mamma that she is quite right," he added, digging the point of his cane deep into the ground beside him. "She is a very clever woman. Don't be frightened," and he laughed harshly, for Sybil was looking at him with great, startled eyes, into which the tears began slowly to rise; "and whatever you do, don't cry. I had meant to keep to commonplaces, but if you cry I shall have to give up the game at once. Perhaps I had better be going." Instead of which, however, he remained where he was, savagely decapitating the cowslips right and left.

"Yes, perhaps," Sybil acquiesced a little faintly, but she, too, did not put out her hand for good-bye.

Suddenly Bernard looked up straight into her face.

"Tell me this one thing before I go: Did you ever care for me, or was it only because I was a suitable husband, that you were willing to marry me? Don't look anxiously towards your maid; I am not going to make love to you, I swear it. I only want to know the truth."

"But what is the good?" faltered Sybil, while her fair brow grew ruffled. "It only disturbs one to think of those things. Surely it is far better to forget all that time, since, after all, we can never get married."

"Far better," grimly acquiesced Bernard. "Your deductions are always logical." The cowslip heads were flying about faster than ever.

"What are you going to do?" asked Sybil, speaking lower. "I mean, have you made any plans?"

"Not many; but I am probably going to South America,

and when once I am there it will depend partly upon which of the Republican armies will have me, and partly upon where there is most chance of fighting. I am not quite a beggar, you know, since my mother left me two hundred a year."

Sybil caught her breath, and the tears which welled up to her eyes this time were tears of sincerest pity.

"Two hundred a year!" she repeated in an awe-struck whisper. "Surely it must be very dreadful to have to live on two hundred a year. Will you not be able to keep a carriage?"

"Hardly. My land-steward has got three hundred a year, and he doesn't even keep a donkey cart."

She looked at him with her beautiful black eyes swimming in tears. Bernard had never seen her so genuinely moved as this. Nothing, in fact, had touched her so deeply as the idea thus awakened. She knew what it would mean to her to do without a carriage, and therefore she was able to appreciate what it must mean to him. It was a thing which came within the range of her perceptions.

Bernard was on the point of saying, "I believe that, after all, you cared for me a little," but he checked himself in time. "And your plans?" he asked instead. "You have got plans too, I presume."

Sybil quickly dried her eyes. She felt that it was foolish to give way to this weakness.

"My plans? Oh, I never have any plans. It is mamma who makes my plans for me."

After an instant's pause she added slowly, as though speaking against her will:

"I suppose mamma means that I shall marry some day."

"And does that mean that you will do it?"

She could not say "No"; and since she was ashamed to say "Yes," she lowered her eyes and stood silent before him.

And this was the girl of whom he had dreamt that she might cleave to him in the face of fate itself!

"Sybil," he said hurriedly, for the cowslip-gathering Miles was drawing nearer, apparently disturbed by the length of the interview, "Sybil, when I first saw you I took you to be a

queen among women, one of those rare creatures before whose greatness and before whose majesty other women must bow, whether they will it or not. Why are you not so? Explain me the riddle, if you can."

Sybil raised her head quickly.

"Do you remember my telling you last year that I was a fraud? You would not believe me then. Perhaps you will now. It is all the explanation I can give. Time to go home, Miles? Yes, I am coming. Good-bye, Mr. Berrincott," and she put out her hand rather blindly, for the tears were again in her eyes.

Bernard took it, but did not quite succeed in saying "Good-bye, Miss Durrant."

"I must be going," said Sybil hurriedly, and it was then only that he became aware that he was still holding her hand. Miles was watching, he knew it, though she pretended to be busy with her flowers, but he knew also that it was the last moment of all. A hundred Miles would not have kept him from catching that beautiful hand to his lips—cowslips and all—and pressing upon it one passionate farewell kiss.

It was not quite as romantic as it sounds, for the hand, besides being beautiful, was also beautifully gloved, so that Bernard's parting impression of Sybil remained for ever after confusedly connected with the best quality of Paris kid, but the intensity of the gesture was such that even Sybil's calmness was not proof against it. As he strode away across the grass with his deer-stalker pulled low on his forehead, she stood with parted lips, gazing and gazing after him as though rooted to the spot. She was scarcely quite herself in that minute; all that there was of blood in her veins was coursing as fast as it could course, all that there was of energy in her nature was up and stirring. Her passion had caught fire at his. For one mad moment, as she marked his lessening figure and felt her hand still tingling with the vigour of his kiss, the possibility of resisting her mother's will presented itself to her mind. Already she had made a step forward as though to call him back, but in that very moment she remembered Gertrude's face as she had stood beside her bed in the darkened nursery

on the morning after that long stormy day, and immediately her courage died away. She stood still with a shiver, while her arms fell helplessly to her side. The fire had died out of her already.

"Yes, Miles, I am coming," she answered quite meekly, when that young woman rather pointedly observed that the basket could not possibly hold any more cowslips for to-day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SECOND GOOD-BYE.

WHEN Bernard reached the house again he locked himself into what had been his writing-room, and, sitting down before his father's old writing-table, wept as he had not wept since old nursery days. His tears were not many, but his cheeks and lips, and the back of his hand on which a stray drop fell, felt as though scorched with their heat. Neither was his passion of grief long, being too violent to endure, but while it lasted it shook him from head to foot. When its strength was spent, he sat for a while quite passive in his chair, looking straight in front of him, and with eyes whose fire seemed exhausted. So that dream was over. Whatever life might yet have in store for him, that one chapter was closed. Of that he felt aware, though he was scarcely yet aware that this abrupt termination was not devoid of a certain sense of relief. Until to-day he had still clung to the thought that Sybil was the woman he had taken her to be; after to-day he could never think so again, and, unknown to herself, he was grateful to her for having destroyed the false image and shown herself as she was. From the ideal Sybil it would have broken his heart to part; to the real Sybil he had felt it possible to say good-bye, even in the very height of farewell pangs.

Next day Bernard left Thornton and went to London. His uncle's offers had been generous to the verge of eccen-

tricity, but his resolve to quit England stood firm. Indeed, he was hurrying his departure by every means in his power, for the Captain was still in London, and it was clear to Bernard that, so long as the dispossessed owner lingered on British soil, a certain delicacy of feeling would keep the new proprietor from taking possession of Thornton. Besides, the papers were full of this sensational case in high life, and London was full, too, of people who had known him in his former character. Clearly he was better out of the way.

During all the peregrinations to all sorts of parts of London, which were a necessary part of the winding up of affairs, he had carefully avoided Laurel Road. He felt strong enough to make a new start in life, neither did he bear his Uncle James any grudge for the good fortune that had fallen in his lap, but he did not feel quite strong enough for a personal interview. It was two days before the one fixed for his departure, that, while returning in a hansom from the office of an attorney in the North West, he grazed another hansom in whose occupant he recognized Captain Berrincott. Instinctively he leant back in order not to be seen, but scarcely had the other hansom passed, than he bent forward again and looked about him. So deep had he been in his thoughts that he only now became aware of being in Laurel Road. At sight of the familiar surroundings and of the well-known Number Thirty-one close ahead, a sudden impulse moved him. Was it not both cowardly and despicable of him to leave England without acknowledging his debt to Marian? Was it not his clear duty to express his gratitude as best he could? At that moment it seemed to him so and, besides, his uncle had just left the house, which made the occasion favourable; so, without taking more time for reflection, Bernard called to his driver to stop.

In the drawing-room, where, as *Jemima* informed him, the ladies were sitting, he found the Misses *Honor*ia and *Valeria* busily engaged with estimates; or, to speak more correctly, it was *Miss Valeria* who was busy at the table with paper and pencil, while *Miss Honor*ia's share of activity was confined to listening and acquiescing, but he did not find the person he

was looking for. Miss Valeria believed that Marian was in the garden, she explained, while somewhat guiltily pushing aside the litter of papers. To the garden, therefore, Bernard betook himself, very much to the relief of both ladies, who were painfully puzzled as to how to receive him, and had been vainly endeavouring to let their greetings be blended with a delicate shade of half-suppressed condolence. It had not been a success, as they both knew, for neither of them was a good hand at acting. Of course they were sorry for him, but of course also it was quite impossible not to rejoice at the good fortune which had befallen their brother-in-law, and of which several good-sized crumbs could not fail to come their way.

It was not difficult to find Marian in the garden, considering that the bushes to hide behind were not many, and the paths to wander on fewer still. She was sitting on the bench under the laburnum-tree with a strip of embroidery beside her, and her hands lying idle in her lap. Neither in her attitude nor mien was there anything which betrayed the exultation of the new-made heiress. The fact was that she had taken refuge here from the conversation of her aunts, and from those eternal estimates of the new life that was to be entered upon so soon.

Bernard, after stepping out of the house, stood still for a minute, looking at her unobserved. So this was the new Marian, the woman whom he had failed to recognise until his eyes had been torn open, whom he longed and yet dreaded to see. And truly this was a different Marian from the one he had known, or so at least it seemed to Bernard in the excitement of the moment. Her brown head was uncovered, and one of the last sunrays, darting over the brick wall, had powdered the soft hair with gold. The curve of what he could see of the cheek, the delicate line of neck and shoulders struck him as they had never struck him before. Had he been blind till now? By the side of the Dry River, when he had seen her kneeling between the two mules with hands clasped in prayer, it had for the first time occurred to him that his cousin was more than merely pretty; to-day he

knew that when he said this to himself he had not been mistaken.

He was still standing thus when Marian, half turning her head, caught sight of him. Her first impulse was to rise quickly.

"Bernard," she said, and a happy smile lit up her face and made it beautiful.

She came forward a few steps, forgetful of everything except the joy of seeing him. But in the same minute, the memory of all that had been came over her with a rush, and she stood still with burning cheeks, looking at him doubtfully, and asking herself how much he knew.

Bernard was too intently busy gazing into the serious child face before him to think of speaking immediately. When a few more moments had passed in silence, Marian, disturbed by his eyes, turned and sat down again on the bench beside her, and even made a feint of taking up her embroidery. The movement roused Bernard.

"Marian," he said, coming up to her, "you are wondering at me, and it is only natural you should. I know I must look like a fool. The fact is, I don't know what to say. I came in here with the intention of thanking you, but now that I am here it has come over me that anything I could try to say would really be ridiculous. After all, I can't say anything except 'Thank you,' can I? And 'Thank you' is a thing one says when a person hands you a plate or passes you the sugar."

"But I haven't even handed you a plate," said Marian, with a rather uncertain attempt at jocularity, and smiling as well as she could. "So you needn't trouble about the 'Thank you.'"

"Let us have no fencing, Marian," and her eyes dropped before his serious gaze; "we both know what we are talking about. I am leaving England the day after to-morrow, and the chances are that we shall never meet again. Let us lose no time. What has to be said between us must be said plainly or not at all. You have run a great risk for the sake of preserving to me my fortune and my name, and I am here to

thank you to-day, if I can. That you should have failed in your object cannot lighten my debt towards you by one grain."

"Then you know," said Marian, almost crying with vexation. "I never meant you to know. Who told you? Not Miss McCrie?"

"Yes, it was Miss McCrie."

Marian started to her feet with blue eyes that flashed fire.

"I shall never forgive her that—I who trusted her so! It is the most horrid thing she could have done—to betray one in that way; surely she has not——"

Here Marian broke off abruptly with a frightened glance at Bernard and stood crumpling up her embroidery between her fingers. Some of the particulars of that last interview under the nutmeg trees were stirring again in her memory, and she felt the blood tingling in her cheeks. Surely it was not possible that that false friend had been as false as *that*? No, no, she would not, she could not believe it; and yet there was about Bernard's look something that she did not know how to account for.

"I hate Miss McCrie," she said between her teeth.

"And I esteem her highly," said Bernard, smiling a little. "She is the first person who has ever spoken the plain truth to me—while I was Bernard Berrincott, that is to say; now that I am Bernard Ingram, I shall be treated to plenty of the unvarnished article, no doubt."

Marian's anger had vanished already, chased away by another feeling.

"Oh, Bernard," she said on impulse, "if only it had been possible! I was so happy when I thought I had done it. And it was so easy to do," she added, confusedly, in hopes of yet saving the situation. "You must not talk as if I had done anything great, and, really and truly, there was nothing at all particular about it; I would have done it for anybody, I really would—I mean, of course, for anybody whom I cared for in the very least; for Miss McCrie, for instance, or—or for father."

Bernard made no reply, and Marian continued to crumple

up her embroidery into a ball, in order not to have to meet his eyes. He was thinking of the cowslip meadow, and of the girl who preferred not to disturb her mind unnecessarily by dwelling on the question as to whether she had ever cared for him or not. There could be no doubt, certainly, that there were several very different sorts of women.

"Answer me one question," he said after a moment—"when you were doing this thing, which you tell me was so easy to do, did it by any chance occur to you that you were giving me your father's fortune, and therefore your own?"

"Yes, it occurred to me, but——"

"And did that make no difference?"

"Difference? Yes, of course it made a difference—in fact it made just the difference that was needed. If it had been anybody else's money that was in question, I might perhaps not have had the courage to do anything; but this way I felt as though I had a sort of right. Don't you see," she went on eagerly, "the whole thing was really quite simple—you needed the money because you were used to it, and father and I could do very well without it. I am sure that he won't even know what to do with it now; it would have been far better for him if he had never got it. It was partly that I was thinking of when I—I did the thing."

Again Bernard made no answer, and in face of his silence her courage failed her for any more of these pitiful attempts at disguising the truth.

"Are you really going away the day after to-morrow?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, I am really going away."

Marian appeared to be struggling with herself.

"And is *she* not going with you?" she asked, hurriedly.

"Can she let you go alone?"

"Apparently she can. I am going, and, please God, I shall not see English shores again until I am a good dozen years older than I am. Don't you remember how I used to listen to Uncle James's stories about his campaigns, and how I used to long to wear a uniform? Well, I am going to have my wish after all—I am going to be a soldier. Good-bye, Marian; think

of me as kindly as you can. Or, perhaps, I ought to say Miss Berrincott," he added, trying to speak lightly, in hopes of making this difficult moment more easy, for the whiteness of her face alarmed him. "Now that you are a full-blown heiress, I suppose you expect to be treated with respect."

"Good-bye, Bernard," she said in a whisper, for fear of the tears that were very near.

"I hope you will be as lucky as I am unlucky; it's the best thing I can wish you, and the most likely thing, too, as matters stand. You will have the cream of everything to pick and choose from; the cream of eligible husbands, too, amongst other things. Wait till you are installed at Thornton, and you will see. Let me hear soon that you have made a proper choice."

It was a laudable attempt at taking the sharpest edge off the situation, but it failed lamentably. She only grew paler by another shade, and Bernard saw that her lips were working. Snatching up her hands he pressed them between his own until they ached.

"It is no use," he said in another voice. "This cannot be our parting. I know everything, Marian—everything; do you understand? It is madness of me to say it, but I cannot bear that there should be the shadow of a veil between us. You must forget me, Marian. I was not joking now when I spoke of eligible husbands. In a few weeks' time there will be dozens of men at your feet; make the best and truest of them your husband, and forget that you ever had an unlucky cousin called Bernard. I am not worthy of such love as yours."

He spoke in breathless haste, and, having said the last word, flung away her hands, and, turning abruptly, left her standing alone upon the gravel path.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TWO QUEENS.

It had been one of the first days of June that Bernard parted from Marian, in the back garden of 31 Laurel Road. When another June came round again with its roses and its thunderstorms, its pleasant evenings and its unpleasant caterpillars, the view which spread itself daily before Marian's eyes was vastly improved; stretches of smooth lawn instead of smoky chimneys, and giant beeches in place of the one poor, meagre laburnum, which had formed the pride of the enclosure. After waiting what he considered to be a decent interval, the captain had taken formal possession of Thornton. But he did so neither joyously nor light-heartedly. This strange fortune which had met him on the threshold of his old age, perplexed and embarrassed almost more than it rejoiced him. If it had been anybody's money except Bernard's he would not have minded it, but the thought that his nephew, for whom he had always had a true fondness, was a loser by his gain, made him feel uncomfortable, do what he would. There was one obvious solution to the difficulty which of course would have made everything straight again, but this was unfeasible, as he soon convinced himself.

"It would be far the simplest if you two could manage to get up a liking for each other," he had observed to Marian one day when the idea first occurred to him. "Don't you think you could manage it? He has always been more of a brother to you, I know, but perhaps if you got used to the thing you might get to like him in a different way. Hey, Marian?"

"No," said Marian, smiling a little wearily, "I don't think I shall ever like him in a different way."

"Of course he is what people call 'a wretched match,' but that doesn't matter considering that you're a first-class one. Upon my word, there's a great deal in the idea; it's only the newness that startles you. At any rate there can be no harm in my writing to Bernard and throwing out a suggestion."

"You shall not do that!" Marian had answered so vehemently that the captain stood still in his pacing of the room and stared in amazement at his daughter. "Do you hear, father?" she had added, coming close up to him, "whatever you do, you must not write that letter to Bernard. I shall never be his wife."

The poor captain left the room crestfallen, without another word. It was the first time in her life that Marian had openly rebelled, and, to his astonishment, he felt that he had no choice but to strike his colours on the spot.

"He is too small a catch for her, that is evident," he reflected within himself; "she has got her head full of all those titled fellows. And yet I never took Marian to be that kind of girl. Dear, dear, to be sure, I suppose there must be something, after all, in what they call the corruption of wealth. I'm blest if I don't feel some of it myself." By which the captain meant that, despite the feeling of mental discomfort from which he was never quite free, he had discovered that there was such a thing as physical comfort, to the charms of which he by no means felt superior. After all, it was quite a different thing to be able to indulge in your second and even third glass of port wine without feeling shy at the thought of your wine merchant's bill, and a valet could not help being a much superior article even to Jemima. With every day did the captain become more distinctly aware of his deep appreciation of the comforts of life. That he also had a certain leaning towards its Epicurean side, was to be surmised from his increasing corpulence, his reddening complexion and duller eye—changes in his appearance which the first half year had brought about, and which Marian watched with growing apprehension. Neither did she like his new habit of falling asleep after dinner—a weakness he never used to indulge in in former days.

In the appearance of the Misses Honoria and Valeria this same half year had likewise wrought alterations, to the delight of the one but to the gentle grief of the other, for Thornton was evidently not the place for doing a banting cure, as Miss Valeria gleefully observed. She had not been three months under her brother-in-law's roof—which, of course, she

never meant to quit again if she could help it—before, in the postscript of a letter addressed to an intimate friend, she bashfully but joyfully confided to her the fact that the waistbands of all her gowns had been let out by half an inch. “But there is no hope for poor Honoria,” she added. “This first-rate cream and these new-laid eggs are so delightfully nourishing and at the same time so irresistible. The dear creature is growing stouter every day. By this time she has given up struggling and has resigned herself to her fate. The only one among us who has not even grown plump is Marian. I have been looking out for the country roses in her cheeks, but she is paler and quieter even than she was in London.”

It was perfectly true. Marian had always been silent and always been serious, but since she was at Thornton she had become an aggravated copy of herself. The place was detestable to her. When she had last been here she had thought to love it; now that everything reminded her of those few happy weeks, she felt as though she could not breathe its air. Rather would she have lived in some dark alley where the sun never shone, in some tumble-down hovel, anywhere rather than in this luxurious home, where the shadow of Bernard seemed to meet her at every turn, reproaching her for being in the place which should have been his. The sight of every farmhouse which she had entered when accompanying him on his daily rounds, of the plans for the model cottages which were discovered in a drawer in the writing-table, of these and many other things, was enough to make the old wound bleed afresh each time. Once—it was on the day when she first saw again the ruined chapel and the ivy-grown walls of the cemetery within the park—a passion of grief seized on her, so intense and so irresistible that she flung herself down face downwards on the ground, not weeping—for the tears would not come—but tearing at the grass with nervous fingers; while her chest heaved with dry sobs and her teeth were tightly locked. It was on this spot that she had met Bernard on the morning after coming to Thornton, and it was here that he had spoken first of the dead Caroline Berrincott, who had become the indirect cause of his misfortune. The sight of the cemetery

walls had brought back the moment so vividly that Marian was frightened at herself. She had not even known that she was capable of such passion as this. From her childhood upwards she had been trained to hide every sign of outward emotion, and the result had been that the strong feelings, forcibly repressed, had grown stronger yet, with the intense strength of concentration. Until to-day she had never thoroughly understood herself, and it was dating from this solitary outburst that she began to see the necessity of battling against her grief. It must not be allowed to master her again in this fashion; the world must not know that she was mourning for her cousin.

From that day forward she carefully avoided the part of the park where the cemetery lay, and she began more frequently to accompany her aunt Valeria to dinner parties and afternoon calls.

And yet, despite of everything she could do, the county pronounced her to be "not like other girls," and the various suitors who had sprung up like mushrooms around the new-made heiress could not understand why it should be so difficult to win a single paltry smile, not to speak of higher favours, which even the most sanguine among them soon came to recognise as standing out of their reach.

The comforts of life had not the same attraction for Marian that they had for her father, partly, no doubt, because youth can more easily dispense with this sort of outward support than middle age, and therefore it was that even this source of consolation failed her. What was the good of it all? She sometimes asked herself, what was she to with all this money placed at her command, since not even one shilling of it could go to lighten Bernard's struggle with existence?

There was one thing, however, for which she wanted her large allowance. Ever since she had learnt of Miss McCrie's dismissal from office, the old maid had become her pensioner. The captain was not much of a connoisseur in ladies' dress, and yet even he was puzzled at the want of variety in Marian's attire, and the dearth of those laces and furbelows which fig-

ured so largely on the persons of his neighbours' daughters, and which surely £20 a month ought to have sufficed to procure. How could he know that about two-thirds of the bank-notes destined for these agreeable frivolities sailed out to St. Clara by the first mail of every month? However indignant she might feel toward the betrayer of her secret, Marian could not let her starve because of having saved her from the consequences of her own rash act, and Miss McCrie had accepted the proffered support without protest, with the same straightforward simplicity that she would have given it. Besides, Miss McCrie was the only person through whom she could occasionally get direct news of Bernard, for the old maid got a letter from Bolivia at least once in every two or three months.

Once, during the first months of her stay at Thornton, Marian had a confidential talk with Sybil. They had met before, more than once, but never without witnesses. The *tête-à-tête*, when it came, took place, strangely enough, during a dance. It was the hunt-ball, which Marian had made a point of attending in order to convince the county that she was, after all, "quite like other girls." Sybil was there too, of course, the queen of the ball, as she had been for these two years past, though to-night, strange to say, her sovereignty was not absolutely undisputed. Among those who had ever been her true subjects treacherous whispers were heard, and as the evening advanced opinions grew more and more divided as to whom the palm of beauty was due—to the stately, black-haired girl in the flowing maize-coloured draperies, or to the slender one in the softly pink robe with the cluster of wild roses in her breast.

"There can't be any question in the matter," an admirer of Sybil's superciliously remarked. "Sybil Durrant flashes upon you the very moment you're over the threshold, while as for the little Berrincott girl, I don't believe anybody would ever have looked at her twice if it were not for her money. Why, she verges on the insignificant. It is nonsense even to dispute about it."

"Then why do you dispute about it?" asked some one else.

"You've been watching her these five minutes, though you may not be aware of it."

"It is quite possible that one would not have looked at her if she had not been the Thornton heiress," another said, "but once you have looked at her it is not so easy to look away again. It's the sort of face that one is always making discoveries in, and I like making discoveries. I began by thinking that her eyes were grey and her hair brown, and now I am quite certain that her eyes are blue, and I am not quite certain whether her hair is not golden, after all. And as for her complexion, which I took at first to be colourless, I am beginning to discover that it is transparent as a piece of mother-o'-pearl, and almost as full of delicate tints. Now what I object to about Miss Durrant is that there are no surprises about her. It is quite true that she flashes upon you, but then she flashes everything upon you at once. The moment you set eyes upon her you know what you have got before you—a big, black-haired woman; for as for the colour of *her* hair and eyes there can't be two opinions, unless one of them comes from a colour-blind person."

"All that is true enough," said a fourth speaker, "but it is not there that the point lies. The real difference between them is that there is a history in one face, and nothing but a serene resignation, at most, in the other."

"What is she being resigned to just now?" came from another. "Can it be Sir Norman Vallington? I am told the engagement is proclaimed."

So a great many more people were told that night. The news was first whispered and then spoken aloud, and many were the congratulations received by Mrs. Durrant. In the course of the evening this newest piece of gossip could of course not fail to reach Marian's ears. Her first feeling was a quite unreasonable sense of indignation. That a woman who had been loved by Bernard, who was still loved by him, as she supposed, should find it possible to marry another man, was in itself incredible enough, and the appearance of Sir Norman, whom she had seen for the first time that evening, only served to make the case appear more monstrous. As she

watched the little man hopping nervously around Sybil's chair, and thought of what Bernard was, her heart swelled in anger against the girl who might have been his wife.

It was during the next half hour, when indignation was still in its first heat, that Marian, entering the toilet-room with about two yards of pink flouncing in her hand, found Sybil Durrant having her maize-coloured draperies readjusted, for the last waltz had been a rather stormy one. Various other young ladies were standing about the room, quivering with impatience while the helpful needle was being plied, and scarcely able to stand still because of the sound of the dance music which penetrated even here. Each made haste to be gone as quickly as was manageable, for there was another round dance on, and five minutes after she had come into the room Marian found herself alone with Sybil. She might have been gone too, had she wanted, for the pink flounce was in its place again, but the maize-coloured draperies had been more troublesome to adjust, and Marian seemed to have made up her mind to wait until they were done, rather to the surprise of Sybil, who glanced at her once or twice enquiringly, and, as it appeared to Marian, almost a little uneasily.

"She knows I am his cousin, and she has a bad conscience," said Marian to herself.

When the attendant spirit rose from her knees and left the two rival queens of the ball standing comparatively alone, Marian, knowing that there was no time to lose, began at once :

"Is it true that you are going to marry Sir Norman Valington?"

"Yes, it is quite true," said Sybil, looking startled.

"But why are you going to marry him? Not because you love him, surely? You need not tell me that you love that man, because I would not believe it. Do not forget that I have seen him."

Sybil looked a little shocked, and her astonishment increased. Evidently she was flurried too, despite her calm exterior, for she began to play with her fan, just as any other girl might have done. Marian, on the other hand, was too

excited to be flurried. Since Bernard was not there to stand up for himself she felt as though it were her sacred duty to take his part.

"Of course I must love him since I am going to marry him," stammered Sybil.

"And have you quite forgotten Bernard?"

The other looked at Marian doubtfully. She would have preferred to escape this *tête-à-tête* had it been possible, and yet Marian had always interested her, ever since the day when she had seen her take that first jump with Bernard by her side.

"Have you really quite forgotten him? I thought it was not possible to forget him. I wish you would tell me how you did it."

"I have not forgotten him," said Sybil, throwing a frightened glance towards the door, and speaking low and quickly.

"Then why do you—how can you—?"

"But it is not I who do anything, or can do anything; it is mamma."

"I don't believe that. No mamma could be so unkind. I am sure it depends upon you. And oh, Miss Durrant, have you ever thought how much he needs some one to love him, out there where he is quite alone, with everything, everything lost? Try and think how dreary the world must be to him. You are not yet married to Sir Norman—oh, do you think it is too late?"

"Too late for what?" asked Sybil aghast, but there were tears in her eyes, as Marian saw.

"Why, for breaking off your engagement, of course, and becoming Bernard's wife."

This time Sybil almost laughed, though her eyelashes were still wet.

"You don't know mamma. If you knew mamma, you would know how funny what you are saying must sound to me."

"Are you afraid of her?"

"I suppose 'afraid' is the right word. At any rate, I could never do anything except what she wants."

"I don't believe that either ; you don't look like the sort of person to be ordered about."

"I can't help what I look like. I have told a great many people so already. You can't think how tired I am of hearing my 'queen-like' qualities talked of. And it is no use telling people that I don't feel a bit queen-like," went on Sybil, warming a little to her subject. "I only want to be let alone, and nobody will leave me. They will go on expecting great things from me, when all the time I am feeling so small, so miserably small, and then, of course, they are disappointed. Don't you understand what I mean ?"

"Yes, I think I am beginning to understand," said Marian thoughtfully.

"It is not my fault, is it, that I am big and have got black eyebrows, and happen to carry my head at an angle that suggests haughtiness ? I assure you that I can't even imagine what it feels like to be haughty ; and though I know that it is generally the strong-minded women that have got black eyebrows, I know just as well that I am weak-minded, ridiculously weak-minded. I am a coward, morally and physically ; I know it, and I do so wish that other people would get to know it too."

She paused, a little short of breath, not being used to speaking so much.

"I see," said Marian. "Yes, I think I see. Shall I tell you what I think ? I don't think it is quite fair upon you to look like that. You ought not to have been so beautiful."

What Marian wanted to express was the impression floating in her mind that the small weaknesses confessed to by Sybil could not help looking all the smaller and more despicable by contrast with her magnificent *physique*.

"Of course I ought not," said Sybil readily. She had always been wonderfully simple about the possession of her beauty. "In this way I feel so incomplete, for I am not what people take me to be, and I don't really know whether I am anything else in particular. I have not got spirit enough to enjoy anything wrong, and I have not got courage enough to do what I know is right. I am not even what they call "a

beautiful statue," for a statue should have no feelings at all, I suppose, and I do feel a good deal sometimes, though it does not generally last very long," she added candidly and with a resigned sigh.

"I am sorry for you," said Marian, putting out her hand and giving Sybil's fingers a furtive little grasp. "I think I understand you better than I did before. I see now that there is no hope for Bernard."

"Not that sort of hope; but I always fancied——"

"What did you always fancy?" asked Marian, growing scarlet under the other's gaze.

"He is sure to get over his disappointment," said Sybil dispassionately, "and he always used to speak so kindly of you. I really do think you would suit him very well."

"But how do you know that I——"

"You? Oh, that part is simple enough. Anybody can see that you are unhappy about something, and I always had a sort of suspicion. That evening when we first met I began to guess, but I never was quite sure until this evening. Now I am certain of it."

"This evening? But what have I said? Haven't I been urging you to marry him?"

"In order that he should not be lonely—yes, that is just it."

"I don't understand; and why can anybody see that I am unhappy about something? Surely, I go to parties and talk just like other girls, and to-night I have been smiling, and even laughing, quite as much as you, for instance."

"Yes, but your eyes—you have not got any control over them; they look so terribly sad."

"Do they really?" said Marian in bewilderment. "Oh, I wish I knew what to do!"

"You must not ask me, for I never even know how to advise myself, but I know what would be the best ending of it all. And you would make a far better wife for him than I ever could have done."

She looked at Marian with friendly eyes as she spoke, and with something like emotion in her voice, for such things as

spite and jealousy were unknown to her. She might be weak, but she was not ungenerous.

"And you would be able to take interest in his plans and projects, and I know that I should have got tired of it all very soon. Those sort of things weary me so terribly ; I am not made for fusses and worries, I know it."

"I wish you would not talk like that," said Marian, almost angrily. "You know that it is all nonsense, and that it can never be. It is you he loves, not me." And for one moment she felt as though she hated Sybil. "It only makes it worse to have those sort of ideas put into one's head."

"Does it really ? Well, I am not going to talk like that, or like anything else either, for I am afraid Sir Norman may send mamma to look for me, and it would be such a bother to explain. It will be far less trouble to go."

And gathering up her gloves and fan from the table beside her, Sybil went from the room, sweeping her maize-coloured draperies behind her ; and as she walked, her features settled back again into that serene resignation which was her habitual expression, and which had been noted by more than one person this evening as being stamped upon her beautiful face in a more than usual degree.

Both before and after this interview Marian and Sybil remained strangers to each other ; the short conversation in the toilet-room was like an oasis of intimacy in the midst of a wide desert of cool acquaintanceship.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE HEIRESS.

It was the beginning of his second year at Thornton that Captain Berrincott's health began visibly to fail, and, before that twelve-months had run to an end, port wine, strong meats, and a generally too luxurious mode of living had done their work so well that one more stone slab arose in the

little cemetery within the park, for the poor captain had been laid to rest beside his cousin Simon.

Marian was alone except for her two aunts—alone, and the most wealthy woman for many miles round. When the acutest stage of her grief had spent itself she resolved to leave this place, which was so hateful to her. It should be the very first use she would make of her liberty and of her money. But where should she go to ?

"If you go to a cold country," Miss Valeria argued, "you can have me as travelling companion ; but if you have set your heart upon a hot country you must take Honoria, for I have no mind to lose all my newly acquired flesh in tropical heats. Why should it be the tropics ? Have you not all the world to choose from ?"

No doubt she had, but in all this wide world there was nevertheless only one little spot to which she felt herself drawn. When Miss Valeria was told that Marian had made up her mind to visit St. Clara her face fell a little, for she would have much enjoyed a trip to Norway, for instance.

"As if there was any sense in looking after those ridiculous canes," she sighed, "now that we are quite independent of such trifles as a sugar plantation."

But of course Marian, being her own mistress, also had her own way ; and so impatient was she to be gone from Thornton that Miss Honoria scarcely had time to order a few light dresses and to buy a big straw hat before she found herself hurried on board the mail steamer "Neptune," which was the next to sail after Marian's resolve had been taken.

Of course it was not the Lot 13 canes that Marian was going to look after at St. Clara. She herself would have found it hard to say why she was going there. To see Miss McCrie, in the first instance, she supposed ; but there was besides in her mind an unacknowledged afterthought to the effect that at St. Clara she would feel nearer Bernard, partly because of those Bolivian letters, and partly because Miss McCrie was the only person to whom she could talk openly about him.

They had been more than a week at sea, and wraps

were already beginning to be discarded, when Marian, established one afternoon in her deck-chair enjoying the first perfect day they had yet had, was aroused by the sound of a familiar name. She had made few acquaintances on board, and had taken her mourning as excuse for keeping aloof from those rough-and-ready entertainments which had amused her so much two years ago ; but she knew that those men talking beside her were West Indian officials of some sort, returning to their posts after a leave of absence.

"Poor Hibbert always was an unlucky dog," one remarked, and Marian immediately laid down the book she had been trying to read and raised her head. What a long time it seemed, to be sure, since she had last heard that name, and how many things it brought back with it!

"Yes, they say his life has been a failure all round, beginning with the shape of his nose and ending with his love affairs."

"For a fair portion of his bad luck no doubt he has got himself to thank. What is the sense of setting sail, when the black fellows tell you—and the black fellows always know best—that there is a storm coming over the hills at the rate of fifty miles an hour?"

"Hibbert always had about as much care of his life as though it were an out-of-date shilling for which there is no use. They say that of late years he has grown more reckless than ever."

Marian had never till to-day spoken to any of the three men thus conversing; but now, somewhat to the consternation of Miss Honoria, she turned to the one nearest to her, whose name she did not know although he sat opposite to her at table, and asked:

"Is the Mr. Hibbert you are speaking of the one who is District Magistrate at Cassacon?"

"*Was* District Magistrate," replied the passenger addressed, after a short pause of astonishment. "Yes, that is exactly what he was."

"And what is he now?"

The three men exchanged a foolishly helpless glance,

aware that neither "food for the fishes" nor "pasture for the worms" was exactly the thing to say, though coming nearest to hitting the nail on the head.

"The poor fellow was drowned last month," said the one with the readiest tongue. "The crossing from St. Clara to Cassacon always is a nasty bit, except in the very nicest weather, and Hibbert always was a madman where prudence was concerned. On this occasion there was a speckled cloud coming over the hills which the niggers told him meant a storm. He took it into his head that he would race the cloud—well, and he lost the race, though it seems to have been a close run, for it was within hail of Cassacon that they went down."

"Have they not even found the body?"

"Yes, they found that caught among the stumps of a dead tree-trunk that lies stranded on the coast. Two of the niggers swam ashore, the bodies of the others have not been recovered."

Marian leant back again in her chair without further remark, and presently the three men began to move off.

"Surely it cannot be that poor Hibbert has thrown away his life too soon?" said one to the other, with a puzzled glance.

"She looks cut up and no mistake, and they say she's a huge heiress. There is no saying whether his luck wasn't on the turn, after all."

Meanwhile Marian remained leaning back immovable in her deck chair for so long that even Miss Honoria's limbs, accustomed as they were to repose, began to feel cramped. As she looked out over the intensely blue water and marked the intensely white flashes which were probably flying-fish, she was thinking of the evening when she had watched this same sight with Mr. Hibbert by her side. The thought that he was no longer of this earth moved her more than she would have believed possible. That man had loved her truly and deeply, of this she was certain—who knows? more deeply, perhaps, than Bernard had loved Sybil. Why had she not been able to love him? Her common sense told her that she was not

guilty of his death, and yet her fancy would not admit that she was quite innocent. It seemed to her that even on closing her eyes she could not help seeing before her the soaked and draggled figure of the District Magistrate lying dead in the fantastically twisted arms of the "Big Mamma." The question as to whether John Hibbert's life were a comedy or a tragedy was settled now at last beyond all manner of doubt.

When, after a prosperous voyage, St. Clara was reached, Miss McCrie was waiting to receive her favourite. This was exactly as Marian had expected, but what was not exactly according to her expectations was the little lady's expression of face and general manner of bearing herself. Considering that her father had been dead for scarcely two months Marian had naturally looked for the element of condolence as chiefly colouring the moment of meeting: to her astonishment, however, when the first hurried phrases were over, nothing more was said about the captain, and no enquiries made about his illness. Miss McCrie even seemed to have some difficulty in maintaining an expression sober enough for the occasion, for Marian caught her once or twice smiling to herself, which was all the stranger considering how kind and sympathetic she had always been two years ago. During the voyage Marian had had visions of exceedingly confidential talks between her and Miss McCrie, but these visions now began to fade. In face of this want of sympathy she would never have the courage to uncloset her heart. She immediately resolved that not even Bernard's name should cross her lips if she could help it. Almost she began to repent having come to St. Clara. Once being here, however, there was no escaping from Miss McCrie. Though the ex-Registrar-General's iron-gray hair had grown sparser, and her sallow skin covered by a yet finer network of wrinkles, she had lost none of her energy and briskness; within an hour of having disembarked, aunt and niece had been packed into a buggy, by which means they reached Prospect that same evening.

Prospect was that same empty house beside the sea between whose bare walls Marian had first made the acquaintance of the former Jess Collins (now Mrs. Philipps, and the proud

mother of two flourishing babies), amidst medicine bottles and pill boxes, and the peaky faces of her little brothers and sisters. The rooms now were not less bare than they had been then; rather they were barer still, owing to the absence of both the bottles and the boxes, for Miss McCrie required no medicines.

"And who lives now at Cane Hill?" enquired Marian when they had strolled into the garden after supper, and were leaning over the very same bit of wall which she and Jess had leaned over side by side on the day when the picnic had been planned. Looking down, as she was now, upon the bright-green creepers—bright enough to be distinguished even through the dusk—as they trailed over the dark sand below, it almost seemed to her that all that lay between this moment and that other must be a dream.

"Tanner and Co. live at Cane Hill themselves," answered Miss McCrie. "At least, I believe so, but I never go near the place; I could not bear to see it so changed."

"There must be a good many things changed about the island," said Marian thoughtfully; "even you are different from what I had expected."

"Am I really?" and Miss McCrie laughed light-heartedly. "Well, so are you, for the matter of that. I have a notion that to meet you at present would not further your cousin Bernard's peace of mind."

"What do you mean?" asked Marian, who in the uncertain light could not see that Miss McCrie's eyes were dancing with mischievous enjoyment.

"Oh, what I mean is very simple, only that things have once again taken their natural course. It is the old, old story of cross purposes :

‘Ein Yüngling liebt ein Mädchen,
Die hat einen Anderen gewählt.’

You used to be fond of your cousin, even very fond of him, as the registry-books can witness, but that was in your obscure days, when you had seen nothing of the world. Now that you are surrounded with suitors, it would scarcely be

fair to expect that his memory should still be green with you."

Marian looked at her companion reproachfully through the dusk, but Miss McCrie's face was half turned aside, and her fingers busy with the scraps of mortar on the top of the wall. Was it possible that she should be misunderstood so cruelly, and by the very woman for whose sympathy she had yearned!

"Well, well," Miss McCrie went on talking, "there is no doubt it is easier to be philosophical when it is your friend, and not yourself, that is concerned. After all, Bernard is not the first young man, and will not be the last, who finds out his right mind too late."

"But what do you call his right mind?" asked Marian a little uneasily.

Miss McCrie appeared not to have heard.

"I was pretty sure it would end that way," she continued quickly. "I never cared for the sound of that big black-haired Sybil; I am sure she is all outside, and no inside, the sort of woman to go to a man's head but not to keep possession of his heart. Poor Bernard reminds me rather of a child that has pricked open its toy balloon to see what it is made of, and is left sitting with a bit of shrunken bladder in its hand."

"Then do you think he has got over his disappointment?" asked Marian with a stormily beating heart. "Is he comforted? Is he fancy-free once more?"

"No," said Miss McCrie boldly, "he is nothing of the sort."

"Then I don't understand——"

"Don't you? I think it is simple enough."

And suddenly, taking Marian's hand, she looked into her eyes as well as the dusk would allow. "Is it really *you* who ask me this?" she earnestly enquired. "Are you honest, or only counterfeiting?"

As Marian snatched away her hand she felt the hot blood coursing over neck and face.

"This is all nonsense," she said unsteadily. "If he cared

for me ever so little, why should he not say so? He found words enough for wooing Sybil."

"Oh, blessed innocence!" sighed Miss McCrie. What! Say it *now*, and have the finger of scorn pointed at him, as at the man who waited to find out that he loved his cousin until that cousin had got his money too? What man could be indifferent to such a suspicion as that? I tell you that, though he were dying for love of you, he would not open his lips so long as you are the mistress of Thornton. But that cannot make much difference to you, since you must have your suitors by the dozen now. You have not told me anything about them yet, by-the-by."

For a few moments Marian stared down in silence at the sands below, then she shook her head.

"It is not possible; it can never be."

"What can never be?"

"I can never marry Bernard."

"I know you cannot," readily assented Miss McCrie, to the disappointment of Marian who had hoped to be contradicted. "I should consider it as violating the duties of friendship to urge upon you so wretchedly bad a match, having, as you have, the *élite* of England to choose from. Ever since you wrote to me about your success at the ball I have given up all hopes for my poor *protégé*. The only thing I should like to plead for is that, if you chance to meet him, you would not snub the poor man more than you can help."

"Meet him?" said Marian, paling a little; "but I thought he was in South America, in the Bolivian army?"

"So he is—so he is; I forget what I am saying. Not that there is any excuse for my memory, seeing how the Bolivian war telegrams are coming to the fore again. They had one or two pretty serious skirmishes last week, and some rather heavy losses."

"And have you heard of Bernard since then?"

"No, I don't suppose he has much time for letter-writing just now; but even supposing there is a more serious reason for his silence, I am not sure that it would not in some ways be the best solution of the difficulty. You see, what between

want of money and want of friends he is having rather a hard time of it altogether. But how have we got back on to this subject? I want to hear about England. Your not being married yet must mean that you are terribly difficult to please. A big heiress like you won't take anything under a duke, I suppose?"

"Do you think his life is very wretched?"

"Whose? Bernard's? What if it be? He will learn to live without either money or friends in time, no doubt; lots of people do. At any rate, it serves him quite right that you should have given him a successor in your heart. You must tell me more about the successor, but not to-night—to-morrow. It is bedtime for travellers."

"But I never said that I had——"

"Of course not; those sort of things are generally betrayed without the help of anything so clumsy as words. I will hear all about it to-morrow, no doubt. Come along now, it is high time."

Marian followed without resistance, and without any further word except the final good-night spoken at the bedroom door. She was far too puzzled to think consecutively, far less to speak. Was Miss McCrie possessed by an evil spirit, that she should so persistently misunderstand every word she said? And why should every one insist upon Bernard being fond of her? Could there possibly be a grain of truth? No, that way she dared not turn; the light was too dazzling to be looked at steadily.

Meanwhile Miss McCrie was descending the staircase somewhat hurriedly with her watch in her hand.

"I think she will do," she said to herself with a sigh of satisfaction. "Now, all ye match-making geniuses, stand by me to make as good a job of him! Nine o'clock; he must be at the gate by this time."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AT THE GATE.

WHEN Miss McCrie had seen Marian to her bedroom her work for the day was not yet over. Any one who had caught a glimpse of the slight woman's figure stealing along the garden path and down towards the gate would have suspected a lovers' tryst, and would have been sure of it when out of the shadow of the wall on the other side of the gate there stepped a tall young man, in a somewhat badly creased linen suit, and with a rather battered but not the less romantic-looking straw hat shading his sunburnt face.

The tall young man seemed a little out of humour.

"Is that you? By Jove, I thought you were not coming. And now, Miss McCrie, unless there is any insuperable objection, would you mind telling me what particular good is gained by my slinking about in this fashion, like a thief with the detective on his heels? I have obeyed your message, but be so kind as to tell me why you could not receive me in the house, like a respectable Christian, and for what possible or impossible reason this interview had to take place at the garden gate."

"I wished to save you from an unpleasant surprise. Do you see the light burning in that window? It is the light in Marian's room."

The young man started violently. "Marian? My cousin Marian?"

"Exactly. She landed from the mail this afternoon in the company of her aunt Honoria."

"Why did you not tell me of this? You must have known she was coming."

"I had a notion of it, certainly, but why should I tell you? There is no need for your meeting; indeed, it would be far better if it could be avoided, since it would only distress you to see her. I imagine it must be very painful to behold yourself loved so truly and to be unable to requite it."

The stranger in the wide-brimmed hat had taken a turn across the road and back again. Now he stood still, and asked in a voice which shook with some sort of suppressed excitement :

"Do you mean that she cares for me still?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. But there is no need to look so solemn; I shall talk her out of it yet, never fear. It is for her best, you know, that she should be talked out of it."

"Yes, I suppose it would be for her best," he agreed, a shade more solemnly. "If I could help you in any way, I would, for my debt to Marian can—never be cancelled."

"Except by the one thing which you are not willing to give."

The young man made a gesture of annoyance.

"Miss Mercury, Miss Mercury, you are an incorrigible old match-maker. We have spoken of this in our letters. Anyone who knows the world ever so little would tell you that since I would have none of Marian when she was a poor little nobody, I cannot possibly make her my wife now that it is my turn to be the nobody."

"That may be, but, you see, I don't know the world, and I am stupid enough to suppose that when two people are fond of each other it doesn't much matter on which side the money and the position happen to be. But I am glad you have spoken so plainly; it simplifies matters. I shall lose no further time in setting upon Marian."

The young man moved a little uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Do you not think it would be wiser to leave that sort of thing to Nature and time?"

"No, I do not. I have no wish to see my beloved Marian eating out her heart for love of a man who, on his side, is eating out his heart for love of Sybil Durrant."

"Sybil Durrant," he repeated, with a rather dreary laugh, "Sybil Durrant is dead for me—dead and buried in a green meadow, and I have planted a cowslip upon her grave."

"And are you quite sure that you have not buried your heart in it?"

"I tried to do so, and I wish I had, but I do not think I have succeeded. Tell me, Miss McCrie, do you believe in the existence of such a thing as second love?"

"Second love? That's a point to discuss some day at leisure. But, in the meantime, it was not to speak about either first or second love that I have come down to the gate; it was to tell you that I have sent a message to Lizzie Silkworth, as I told you I would do yesterday, and she has promised to be in until after six to-morrow evening. You had better not put it off even for a day, for Lizzie is the merest bird of passage. When I wrote to you that she had turned up on St. Clara, I never expected her to remain here until you had arrived. And now, good-night, Mr. Berrincott. But stop, another word: I don't know whether you care about my opinion, but I can't resist telling you that I find your present self a vast improvement upon your former self. You may think I am joking, but, upon my soul, I am serious when I tell you that these two years in the Bolivian army have been the best possible finisher to your education, and the most satisfactory means of working off some of that superfluous energy through whose mere existence you were bound to make yourself into a universal nuisance, whether you wanted to or no. Your anxiety to improve the world used to be so great that you were not able to look on when you saw a child ill-managed, or furniture ill-placed; but since you have had to fight your own battle, I verily believe that you could behold a boiling kettle blistering all the polish of a drawing-room table without necessarily interfering, unless it was your special business to do so."

"How long is she going to stay in the island?"

"Lizzie Silkworth? Marian? I really cannot say. But to return to the subject of to-morrow—I shall lie in wait for you on your return from Periwinkle Hut in order to hear the news. There is a depression in the beginning of the hills, which goes by the name of the Old Provision-ground; you will find me waiting for you there beside the watch-hut."

"But what will you do with Marian during the time?" he enquired, a little anxiously.

"I shall dispose of her somehow, never fear. Of course, a meeting between you two must be avoided by every means."

"I suppose it must. But don't forget that if there is anything I can do——"

"The only thing you could do would be to help me to find a suitable husband for your cousin."

"I cannot possibly do that," returned the young man, almost snappishly. "I have never studied match-making."

"Oh, yes, you can do it, if you try, and it stands to reason that, of all the people in the world, you ought to be the most anxious to see Marian happily settled. It cannot be such a hard task either, for your cousin has vastly improved in looks during these last two years, as perhaps it may interest you to hear. She used to be a sort of outline sketch, neither filled in nor finished, whereas now she is a completed picture. I am glad of it, for the more adorers she has the more easily will she get over her first childish romance."

"Ye-es, so I imagine," acquiesced the young man, somewhat gloomily, whereupon there soon followed "good-night," and some more minute directions as to the time and place of meeting next day.

"He is pretty mad, too," was Miss McCrie's reflection, as she returned to the house. "I have done all that it lies in human nature to do; the surroundings must do the rest."

She was distinctly hopeful, and she would have been more hopeful still had she known that, for more than an hour after she parted from him, Bernard was haunting the roads and paths around Prospect, and clambering over the rocks in hopes of refreshing himself by a glimpse of the light in Marian's window. It was not until the house had sunk into unresponsive darkness that he stole away among the shadows.

To see her without being seen, that was all the wish he was aware of. But how was the thing to be done? There was a question weighing on his mind, to which one sight of his cousin's face would be an answer. That he esteemed her as the first and foremost among women, and thanked her with a species of awe struck gratitude for the affection she had wasted

upon him, he had long known. And yet without seeing her again he could not dare to say what she was to him, whether a goddess to be distantly adored, or a woman to be loved with human ardour. Not that hope could ever grow out of that one moment—it must be a farewell glimpse.

To confide in Miss McCrie seemed to be the only chance, and Miss McCrie was to meet him at the Old Provision-ground on his way back from Lizzie Silkworth's lodging. It is scarcely too much to say that when, on the following afternoon, Bernard set out for the Periwinkle Hut, his mind was at least as much taken up with what he was going to say to Miss McCrie on the way back, as with the questions he was meaning to put to Joseph Silkworth's widow.

The Periwinkle Hut stood within the forest upon a space of ground that had been cleared years ago, but whose irrepressible vegetation was forever creeping back again to the spot from which it had been ousted. Here Lizzie Silkworth was enjoying the hospitality of a distant kinswoman, and here it was that Bernard found himself confronted by a dishevelled, grizzly-haired woman, draped in gaudy rags, with haggard black eyes and a yellow, fever-stricken face. At sight of him she staggered to her feet, and stood there decked with glass beads and paper flowers, the most pitiable wreck of a light woman that had ever met his eyes.

"Is't your fortune you've come after being told?" she asked, clutching at a table for support. "Or maybe you're the gen'lleman as wanted to ask me some questions? You'll excuse my sitting down, won't you?" And she collapsed on to a chair, being either too weak or not quite sober enough to maintain the perpendicular for longer at a time.

Bernard explained the reason of his coming as briefly as was consistent with clearness.

"Mrs. Simon!" repeated Lizzie, with a drunken yawn. "Lor', what a time it seems since I've even heard her name! No, sure enough she wasn't dead when Joseph and I got married. It was Joseph's idea to have her carried over to the Little House before the wedding, and a first-class idea it was, for it couldn't make any difference to her in which of the

houses she died, while to us it made all the difference in the world in which of the houses we got settled."

"All this does not explain what motive your husband had in falsifying Mrs. Simon's death."

"Oh, yes, it does!" and Lizzie laughed tipsily, and with her shaking fingers adjusted another paper rose among her grizzled locks. "You see, we had barely been married a week or two when there comes a letter from Mr. Simon, written in a great hurry like, and insisting on knowing the exact day on which Mrs. Simon had died. Joseph was regular taken aback, not being used to Mr. Simon troubling his thoughts about Mrs. Simon. If he had known about the second marriage then, no doubt matters would have become a bit plainer; but the news of that did not come to the island till some time later, and all the explanation Joseph could think of was that Mr. Simon had an eye upon him for having turned Mrs. Simon out of the Big House in spite of his having been forbidden to do so, and that's why he thought it was safer to put her down as having died on June 18th, instead of on June 30th, when we were not married yet and when the Big House was entirely at her disposal. As Joseph said, it wasn't likely that Mr. Simon would enquire into the matter, and neither he did."

"Did your husband realise that my father's second marriage was invalid?"

Lizzie shrugged her bony shoulders.

"That's more than I can tell you. The news of the marriage did not come to the island till a couple of months later, and there were jokes made about the shortness of the mourning; but whether Joseph, or anyone else, took the trouble to enquire into the exact dates I cannot say. Since it was nobody's special interest to do so I suppose it wasn't done."

Lizzie had now reached the end of her wisdom, as was proved by a few more questions; and when Bernard presently turned his back upon the Periwinkle Hut, it was with the conviction in his mind that the question of the Big and the Little House at Lot 13 had in truth underlain the whole question of Mrs. Simon's date of death, and consequently of his own illegitimacy.

"After this I should like to see a fellow trying to make out to me that thirteen is not the unluckiest number ever invented," was Bernard's reflection, as he tramped after his small, dusky guide along the weed-grown path which led to the Old Provision-ground.

CHAPTER XL.

THE OLD PROVISION-GROUND.

WHEN, on the day after her arrival at St. Clara, Miss McCrie suggested to Marian an afternoon ride, the idea was met with a certain degree of coolness. How was it that people never could remain where they were, even for one single day, Marian wanted to know? And, besides, she was not half rested from the journey; she would much prefer having the rocking-chair placed in the garden and spending the afternoon there in the shade of the purple-wreath tree.

"And leaving me to take my ride in my own society! As if it was not bad enough to have to ride a base mule in place of my beloved Mosquito, but you must needs condemn me to solitude as well!"

"But why can't you stay at home?"

"Because I have some very urgent business up beside the Old Provision-ground."

"Very well," said Marian, resignedly, "so be it."

She had quickly reflected that if Miss McCrie would not stay at home, there was no alternative but to go with her. During the whole of the forenoon she had been trying to summon courage to ask more questions about those Bolivian skirmishes, which Miss McCrie had touched upon in her talk yesterday. It was strange that she should have seen nothing at all relating to Bolivia in the war-telegrams before leaving home; but of course all sorts of things might have happened in a fortnight, and there was no denying that all sorts of things were always happening in Bolivia. By accompanying

Miss McCrie on this afternoon ride she would be sure to find out some more details, quite casually, as it were.

Nevertheless, it was not until the hills had been reached, and the mules abandoned to the charge of an opportune negro, that she ventured to approach the subject. They had just picked their way across a stream whose water, clear as glass, tinkled deliciously among the stepping-stones, when Marian began to realise that she was wasting her opportunities. They had entered the forest now, as was proclaimed by the tops of the tree-ferns, on which they could look down as on an eternally moving green carpet from the steep bank along which ran the path.

"You have never told me, by-the-by, with whom the Bolivians are fighting," began Marian abruptly, just as they emerged upon this path. She had meant to lead up to the subject more skilfully than this, but in critical junctures her diplomacy was apt to fail her. "Is it with one of their neighbours, or have they been deposing another President?"

The path was narrow, and Miss McCrie had been rather inexplicably anxious for Marian to take the lead, so that the latter was not able to note the expression of her companion's face, else the flash of merriment called forth by this apparently simple question might not improbably have aroused some suspicions.

"The Bolivians? Why, to tell the truth, I have not been studying the papers, but neither is it necessary to do that in order to know that the Bolivians have got each other by the throat all round in their usual manner."

"But I always hoped that sort of fighting was not so very dangerous."

"Did you? Well, I dare say it is a few degrees more harmless than European warfare—that is to say, for the sensible, cool-headed people who are properly furnished with the better part of valour; but as for any of your hot-blooded young scatter-brains, or a man, for instance, who has got no particular object to live for, I doubt whether he could play at any more dangerous sort of game than a Bolivian revolution."

Marian made no further remark, but relapsed into anxious

silence as she slowly toiled upwards, with the skirt of her linen riding-habit flung over one arm and her light straw hat slung like a basket from the other, leaving uncovered her soft brown hair, which every stray sunbeam turned into gold.

Soon the path had died away to a track, while with every step the vegetation was growing thicker, leafy curtains closing in on every side, gradually but surely. Leaves in various stages of decay and the torn sheaves of palm-trees littered the ground. At one spot Marian all but stumbled over a big sheaf that lay across the track like a smooth brown trough more than half filled with water. Denser and ever more densely was the green network drawing together, the fine spun threads growing more and more closely knit, when, just as it seemed as though further progress must of necessity become impossible, the path suddenly opened out at the same time as it reached the level.

It was a deeply secluded spot which they had now entered on, a sort of cauldron in the hills which neither sunshine nor wind were able to invade, because of the tall dark trees standing so jealously on guard all around. An almost palpable sense of oppression hung in the air. In the far-off shadow monstrous palms towered dimly, monstrous ferns loomed indistinctly through the wonderfully tinted gloom, while here and there in the midst of the luxuriant green, fed by floating vapours, the orange and crimson of the wild plantains burned like dull tongues of flame. Close beside the path a pine-apple blossom run wild was rearing its pink crests on the spot where a few yellow pumpkin gourds and the white flowers of a stray arrow-root plant still marked the remains of what had once been a "provision-ground," but these, too, drooped their sickly and over-fed leaves under the universal oppression, and their very stalks were clammy with moisture. An old watch-hut—that is, four sticks and a piece of palm matting—occupied the centre of the open space, and beside it a broken copper half full of rain-water helped to proclaim a human presence of long ago. Of very long ago, surely—such was Marian's first impression as she stepped out on to the open space and felt herself taken possession of by the seclusion and silence of

the spot, as by some living and tangible power. She was about to turn to her companion with a question, when something moved in the green shadow—something that was neither green nor a shadow—and she became aware of a man leaning with folded arms against the stem of a thick old mango tree.

His back was partly turned to her, and both the dress and the wide-brimmed straw hat were unfamiliar, and yet there was something either in the attitude or the curve of the shoulders which made her press forward with an undefinable sense of expectation. At sound of her steps breaking the dead silence of the place he turned.

"Bernard!" was all she could say, standing still with hands outstretched and eyes that filled suddenly with tears. Despite the new-grown beard and the broad shadow of the hat-brim, she had not hesitated for a moment.

Bernard's sunburnt face flushed angrily. His first impulse was to look beyond Marian and to say, "You have done this!" for in one instant he had caught sight of the trap into which he had been so simple-minded as to stumble. But how was this? To look beyond Marian was easy enough, but in the same moment his eyes returned to her of necessity, seeing that there was nothing to be gazed upon but plantains and arrow-root, not a trace of any such personage as Miss Mercury. The two cousins were alone in the Old Provision-ground, and Marian was laughing and crying and repeating incoherently:

"Oh, Bernard, is it really you? Oh, Bernard, thank Heavens that you are safe!"

"It is I," repeated Bernard, still keeping his head in the air, though at sight of the blue eyes full of happy tears everything, including the future and the object of existence, had become marvellously and irresistibly clear. "It is I, but this is not my doing. I never intended to meet you here."

"Nor I either. I will go away again if you like; but only tell me first that it is all right; are you quite sure you are not wounded? Oh, Bernard, I was so frightened——"

In discussing the day's events later on, neither of the two cousins could quite distinctly remember what exactly had hap-

pened at this juncture. Marian had a hazy recollection of having made an unsteady step forward, and Bernard fancied that he must have put out his arm. However provoked he might be feeling with Miss Mercury for her underhand conduct in the matter, he could not well do less than save his cousin from falling.

It was not until a full minute had passed that Marian came to her senses sufficiently to realise that she was sobbing in Bernard's arms. With a sense of shame she quickly raised her head.

"No," she stammered, "that is not it; I had forgotten. Let me go, Bernard—I am only your cousin; let me go." But even as she said it her eye was caught by the threadbare spot on the elbow of his sleeve and the battered brim of his old straw hat, and, with the recollection of Miss McCrie's words of last night, "He will learn to live without money and without friends," such an overwhelming sense of pity came over her that pride and reserve and shame itself fell before it.

"No, no," she said in the same breath, "do not let me go; hold me fast—I am yours, Bernard, if you will have me."

"Oh, yes," Miss McCrie frankly confessed that evening after supper, when a council was being held in the sitting-room of Prospect, "oh, yes, I plead guilty to everything, and, what is more, I am quite untouched by any such feeling as remorse. Just consider the situation dispassionately, if you can. On one side, this young man sitting on his high horse and saying: 'What, I make an offer of marriage to my cousin, now that she has got enough to live upon? Death would be infinitely preferable to such degradation.' And, on the other hand, this young lady throwing up her hands and declaring, in a voice choked with sobs, that no bribe on earth could induce her to press herself upon the notice of a man whose affections have once upon a time been otherwise engaged, and all the time both of them breaking their hearts in the most approved fashion. It was clearly a case in which it required an unscrupulous old maid like me to push them straight into each other's arms. I don't generally approve of

telling lies, but in this case I saw no harm even in inventing the Bolivian revolution, which, as I calculated, would supply that subtle element of anxiety so well adapted—when followed by the reaction of relief—to overthrow the restrictions of conventional prudence. And now my confession is made, and I bow my head in preparation for the bolts of your righteous wrath."

Before she had done speaking, Marian's arms were about her neck.

"You shall come with us to Thornton," was whispered in her ear, "and you shall stay with me till I am married. That is to be your punishment."

Marian and Bernard have been married now for so many years that it sometimes seems to him as a dream that he should ever have loved any other woman.

It was on the eve of their wedding day, that Bernard said to his bride:

"I used to be angry with the people who write verses and plays, for I thought it was not fair to raise a man's expectations regarding the state that is called 'being in love.' But I have changed my mind about that. Do you know, Marian, I am actually beginning to think that the poet fellows are right after all."

The young couple spend most of their time at Thornton, but there seldom passes an entire year without a trip being made to St. Clara, where, despite her tender attachment to "home," the ex-registrar-general feels more in place in the warme shadow of cocoa-nut palms than beneath the chilly shade of English oaks.

Messrs. Tanner and Co. still reign supreme at Cane Hill, and still keep their eye upon Lot 13, but have not yet succeeded in adding this last-named sugar plantation to their present property. Nor is it likely that they will have their wish, for neither Bernard nor Marian are inclined to part with the estate.

"It may not be a mine of wealth," Marian once said laughingly, "but have you realised, Bernard, that it was at Lot 13

that we found each other ? If it had not been for that so-called unlucky number, you would now be the husband of Sybil Durrant, and I your little cousin as before."

"I have realised it," said Bernard, taking her into his arms, "which comes to the same as realising that the spell of Number Thirteen is broken for ever and aye."

THE END.

APPLETONS' TOWN AND COUNTRY LIBRARY.

PUBLISHED SEMIMONTHLY.

1. *The Steel Hammer.* By LOUIS ULBACH.
2. *Eve.* A Novel. By S. BARING-GOULD.
3. *For Fifteen Years.* A Sequel to *The Steel Hammer.* By L. ULBACH.
4. *A Counsel of Perfection.* A Novel. By LUCAS MALET.
5. *The Deemster.* A Romance. By HALL CAINE.
6. *A Virginia Inheritance.* By EDMUND PENDLETON.
7. *Ninette:* An Idyll of Provence. By the author of *Véra*.
8. "*The Right Honourable.*" A Romance of Society and Politics. By JUSTIN MCCARTHY and MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
9. *The Silence of Dean Mailland.* By MAXWELL GREY.
10. *Mrs. Lorimer:* A Study in Black and White. By LUCAS MALET.
11. *The Elect Lady.* By GEORGE MACDONALD.
12. *The Mystery of the "Ocean Star."* By W. CLARK RUSSELL.
13. *Aristocracy.* A Novel.
14. *A Recoiling Vengeance.* By FRANK BARRETT. With Illustrations.
15. *The Secret of Fontaine-la-Croix.* By MARGARET FIELD.
16. *The Master of Rathkelly.* By HAWLEY SMART.
17. *Donovan:* A Modern Englishman. By EDNA LYALL. (Cheap edition.)
18. *This Mortal Coil.* By GRANT ALLEN.
19. *A Fair Emigrant.* By ROSA MULHOLLAND.
20. *The Apostate.* A Romance. By ERNEST DAUDET.
21. *Raleigh Westgate;* or, Epimenides in Maine. By HELEN K. JOHNSON.
22. *Arius the Libyan:* A Romance of the Primitive Church.
23. *Constance, and Calbot's Rival.* By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.
24. *We Two.* By EDNA LYALL. (Cheap edition.)
25. *A Dreamer of Dreams.* By the author of *Thoth*.
26. *The Ladies' Gallery.* By JUSTIN MCCARTHY and MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
27. *The Reproach of Annesley.* By MAXWELL GREY.
28. *Near to Happiness.*
29. *In the Wire-Grass.* By LOUIS PENDLETON.
30. *Lace.* A Berlin Romance. By PAUL LINDAU.
31. *American Coin.* A Novel. By the author of *Aristocracy*.
32. *Won by Waiting.* By EDNA LYALL.
33. *The Story of Helen Davenant.* By VIOLET FANE.
34. *The Light of Her Countenance.* By H. H. BOYESEN.
35. *Mistress Beatrice Cope.* By M. E. LE CLERC.
36. *The Knight-Errent.* By EDNA LYALL.
37. *In the Golden Days.* By EDNA LYALL.
38. *Giraldi;* or, The Curse of Love. By ROSS GEORGE DERING.
39. *A Hardy Norseman.* By EDNA LYALL.
40. *The Romance of Jenny Harlowe, and Sketches of Maritime Life.* By W. CLARK RUSSELL.
41. *Passion's Slave.* By RICHARD ASHE-KING.
42. *The Awakening of Mary Fenwick.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
43. *Countess Loreley.* Translated from the German of RUDOLF MENDER.
44. *Blind Love.* By WILKIE COLLINS.

45. *The Dean's Daughter.* By SOPHIE F. F. VEITCH.
46. *Countess Irene.* A Romance of Austrian Life. By J. FOGERTY.
47. *Robert Browning's Principal Shorter Poems.*
48. *Frozen Hearts.* By G. WEBB APPLETON.
49. *Djambek the Georgian.* By A. G. VON SUTTNER.
50. *The Craze of Christian Engelhart.* By HENRY FAULKNER DARNELL.
51. *Lal.* By WILLIAM A. HAMMOND, M. D. (Cheap edition.)
52. *Aline.* A Novel. By HENRY GRÉVILLE.
53. *Joost Avelingh.* A Dutch Story. By MAARTEN MAARTENS.
54. *Katy of Catocin.* By GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND.
55. *Throckmorton.* A Novel. By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
56. *Expatriation.* By the author of *Aristocracy.*
57. *Geoffrey Hampstead.* By T. S. JARVIS.
58. *Dmitri.* A Romance of Old Russia. By F. W. BAIN, M. A.
59. *Part of the Property.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
60. *Bismarck in Private Life.* By a Fellow Student.
61. *In Low Relief.* By MORLEY ROBERTS.
62. *The Canadians of Old.* An Historical Romance. By PHILIPPE GASPÉ.
63. *A Squire of Low Degree.* By LILY A. LONG.
64. *A Fluttered Dovecote.* By GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.
65. *The Nugents of Carriconna.* An Irish Story. By TIGHE HOPKINS.
66. *A Sensitive Plant.* By E. and D. GERARD.
67. *Doña Luz.* By JUAN VALERA. Translated by Mrs. M. J. SERRANO.
68. *Pepita Jimenez.* By JUAN VALERA. Translated by Mrs. M. J. SERRANO.
69. *The Primes and Their Neighbors.* Tales of Middle Georgia. By RICHARD MALCOLM JOHNSTON.
70. *The Iron Game.* By HENRY F. KEENAN.
71. *Stories of Old New Spain.* By THOMAS A. JANVIER.
72. *The Maid of Honor.* By HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD.
73. *In the Heart of the Storm.* By MAXWELL GREY.
74. *Consequences.* By EGERTON CASTLE.
75. *The Three Miss Kings.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
76. *A Matter of Skill.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
77. *Maid Marian, and Other Stories.* By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
78. *One Woman's Way.* By EDMUND PENDLETON.
79. *A Merciful Divorce.* By F. W. MAUDE.
80. *Stephen Ellicott's Daughter.* By Mrs. J. H. NEEDELL.
81. *One Reason Why.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
82. *The Tragedy of Ida Noble.* By W. CLARK RUSSELL.
83. *The Johnstown Stage, and Other Stories.* By ROBERT H. FLETCHER.
84. *A Widower Indeed.* By RHODA BROUGHTON and ELIZABETH BISLAND.
85. *The Flight of the Shadow.* By GEORGE MACDONALD.
86. *Love or Money.* By KATHARINE LEE.
87. *Not All in Vain.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
88. *It Happened Yesterday.* By FREDERICK MARSHALL.
89. *My Guardian.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
90. *The Story of Philip Melhuen.* By Mrs. J. H. NEEDELL.
91. *Amethyst: The Story of a Beauty.* By CHRISTABEL R. COLERIDGE.

92. *Don Braulio*. By JUAN VALERA. Translated by CLARA BELL.
93. *The Chronicles of Mr. Bill Williams*. By RICHARD M. JOHNSTON.
94. *A Queen of Curds and Cream*. By DOROTHEA GERARD.
95. "*La Bella*" and Others. By EGERTON CASTLE.
96. "*December Roses*." By MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
97. *Jean de Kerdren*. By JEANNE SCHULTZ.
98. *Etelka's Vow*. By DOROTHEA GERARD.
99. *Cross Currents*. By MARY A. DICKENS.
100. *His Life's Magnet*. By THEODORA ELMSLIE.
101. *Passing the Love of Women*. By MRS. J. H. NEEDELL.
102. *In Old St. Stephen's*. By JEANIE DRAKE.
103. *The Berkeleys and Their Neighbors*. By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
104. *Mona Maclean, Medical Student*. By GRAHAM TRAVERS.
105. *Mrs. Bligh*. By RHODA BROUGHTON.
106. *A Stumble on the Threshold*. By JAMES PAYN.
107. *Hanging Moss*. By PAUL LINDAU.
108. *A Comedy of Elopement*. By CHRISTIAN REID.
109. *In the Suntime of her Youth*. By BEATRICE WHITBY.
110. *Stories in Black and White*. By THOMAS HARDY and Others.
- 110½. *An Englishman in Paris*. Notes and Recollections.
111. *Commander Mendoza*. By JUAN VALERA.
112. *Dr. Pavull's Theory*. By MRS. A. M. DIEHL.
113. *Children of Destiny*. By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
114. *A Little Minz*. By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
115. *Capt'n Davy's Honeymoon*. By HALL CAINE.
116. *The Voice of a Flower*. By E. GERARD.
117. *Singularly Deluded*. By the author of *Ideala*.
118. *Suspected*. By LOUISA STRATENUS.
119. *Lucia, Hugh, and Another*. By MRS. J. H. NEEDELL.
120. *The Tutor's Secret*. By VICTOR CHERBULIEZ.
121. *From the Five Rivers*. By MRS. F. A. STEEL.
122. *An Innocent Impostor, and Other Stories*. By MAXWELL GREY.
123. *Ideala*. By SARAH GRAND.
124. *A Comedy of Masks*. By ERNEST DOWSON and ARTHUR MOORE.
125. *Relics*. By FRANCES MACNAB.
126. *Dodo: A Detail of the Day*. By E. F. BENSON.
127. *A Woman of Forty*. By ESMÈ STUART.
128. *Diana Tempest*. By MARY CHOLMONDELEY.
129. *The Recipe for Diamonds*. By C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE.
130. *Christina Chard*. By MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
131. *A Gray Eye or So*. By FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE.
132. *Earls court*. By ALEXANDER ALLARDYCE.
133. *A Marriage Ceremony*. By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
134. *A Ward in Chancery*. By MRS. ALEXANDER.

Each, 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, 75 cents and \$1.00.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., Publishers, 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

D. APPLETON & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

NOVELS BY MAARTEN MAARTENS.

THE GREATER GLORY. *A Story of High Life.*

By MAARTEN MAARTENS, author of "God's Fool," "Joost Avelingh," etc. 12mo. Cloth, \$1.50.

"A remarkably fine novel, vividly realistic in the best sense of that qualification, and wonderfully strong in its character drawing. The author may unquestionably be ranked among the most brilliant of living writers of fiction. He is a thorough literary artist, and in all that he does his profound study and knowledge of human nature are made manifest. The dramatic interest of the story is vigorous, and its pathos and its humor are alike admirable. Those who have read his earlier books will need no inducement to make themselves acquainted with this, the most recent of his masterly contributions to the literature of fiction."—*Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*.

GOD'S FOOL. By MAARTEN MAARTENS. 12mo.
Cloth, \$1.50.

"Throughout there is an epigrammatic force which would make palatable a less interesting story of human lives or one less deftly told."—*London Saturday Review*.

"Perfectly easy, graceful, humorous. . . . The author's skill in character-drawing is undeniable."—*London Chronicle*.

"A remarkable work."—*New York Times*.

"Maarten Maartens has secured a firm footing in the eddies of current literature. . . . Pathos deepens into tragedy in the thrilling story of 'God's Fool.'"—*Philadelphia Ledger*.

"Its preface alone stamps the author as one of the leading English novelists of to-day."—*Boston Daily Advertiser*.

"The story is wonderfully brilliant. . . . The interest never lags; the style is realistic and intense; and there is a constantly underlying current of subtle humor. . . . It is, in short, a book which no student of modern literature should fail to read."—*Boston Times*.

"A story of remarkable interest and point."—*New York Observer*.

JOOST AVELINGH. By MAARTEN MAARTENS.
12mo. Cloth, \$1.50.

"So unmistakably good as to induce the hope that an acquaintance with the Dutch literature of fiction may soon become more general among us."—*London Morning Post*.

"In scarcely any of the sensational novels of the day will the reader find more nature or more human nature."—*London Standard*.

"A novel of a very high type. At once strongly realistic and powerfully idealistic."—*London Literary World*.

"Full of local color and rich in quaint phraseology and suggestion."—*London Telegraph*.

"Maarten Maartens is a capital story-teller."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"Our English writers of fiction will have to look to their laurels."—*Birmingham Daily Post*.

"Qualities of imagination which Dutch art hardly ever achieves save on the canvases of Rembrandt."—*Manchester Examiner*.

New York : D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

D. APPLETON & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

MANY INVENTIONS. By RUDYARD KIPLING.
Containing fourteen stories, several of which are now published for the first time, and two poems. 12mo, 427 pages.
Cloth, \$1.50.

"The reader turns from its pages with the conviction that the author has no superior to-day in animated narrative and virility of style. He remains master of a power in which none of his contemporaries approach him—the ability to select out of countless details the few vital ones which create the finished picture. He knows how, with a phrase or a word, to make you see his characters as he sees them, to make you feel the full meaning of a dramatic situation."—*New York Tribune*.

"'Many Inventions' will confirm Mr. Kipling's reputation. . . . We would cite with pleasure sentences from almost every page, and extract incidents from almost every story. But to what end? Here is the completest book that Mr. Kipling has yet given us in workmanship, the weightiest and most humane in breadth of view."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"Mr. Kipling's powers as a story-teller are evidently not diminishing. We advise everybody to buy 'Many Inventions,' and to profit by some of the best entertainment that modern fiction has to offer."—*New York Sun*.

"'Many Inventions' will be welcomed wherever the English language is spoken. . . . Every one of the stories bears the imprint of a master who conjures up incident as if by magic, and who portrays character, scenery, and feeling with an ease which is only exceeded by the boldness of force."—*Boston Globe*.

"The book will get and hold the closest attention of the reader."—*American Bookseller*.

"Mr. Rudyard Kipling's place in the world of letters is unique. He sits quite aloof and alone, the incomparable and inimitable master of the exquisitely fine art of short-story writing. Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson has perhaps written several tales which match the run of Mr. Kipling's work, but the best of Mr. Kipling's tales are matchless, and his latest collection, 'Many Inventions,' contains several such."—*Philadelphia Press*.

"Of late essays in fiction the work of Kipling can be compared to only three—Blackmore's 'Lorna Doone,' Stevenson's marvelous sketch of Villon in the 'New Arabian Nights,' and Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles.' . . . It is probably owing to this extreme care that 'Many Inventions' is undoubtedly Mr. Kipling's best book."—*Chicago Post*.

"Mr. Kipling's style is too well known to American readers to require introduction, but it can scarcely be amiss to say there is not a story in this collection that does not more than repay a perusal of them all."—*Baltimore American*.

"As a writer of short stories Rudyard Kipling is a genius. He has had imitators, but they have not been successful in dimming the luster of his achievements by contrast. . . . 'Many Inventions' is the title. And they are inventions—entirely original in incident, ingenious in plot, and startling by their boldness and force."—*Rochester Herald*.

"How clever he is! This must always be the first thought on reading such a collection of Kipling's stories. Here is art—art of the most consummate sort. Compared with this, the stories of our brightest young writers become commonplace."—*New York Evangelist*.

"Taking the group as a whole, it may be said that the execution is up to his best in the past, while two or three sketches surpass in rounded strength and vividness of imagination anything else he has done."—*Hartford Courant*.

"Fifteen more extraordinary sketches, without a tinge of sensationalism, it would be hard to find. . . . Every one has an individuality of its own which fascinates the reader."—*Boston Times*.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

D. APPLETON & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

BOOKS BY SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.

THE SIMPLE ADVENTURES OF A MEMSAHIB. By SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN. With 37 Illustrations by F. H. TOWNSEND. 12mo. Cloth, \$1.50.

"It is impossible for Sara Jeannette Duncan to be otherwise than interesting. Whether it be a voyage around the world, or an American girl's experiences in London society, or the adventures pertaining to the establishment of a youthful couple in India, there is always an atmosphere, a quality, a charm peculiarly her own."—*Brooklyn Standard-Union*.

"It is like traveling without leaving one's armchair to read it. Miss Duncan has the descriptive and narrative gift in large measure, and she brings vividly before us the street scenes, the interiors, the bewilderingly queer natives, the gayeties of the English colony."—*Philadelphia Telegraph*.

"Another witty and delightful book."—*Philadelphia Times*.

A SOCIAL DEPARTURE: How Orthodocia and I Went Round the World by Ourselves. By SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN. With 111 Illustrations by F. H. TOWNSEND. 12mo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, \$1.75.

"Widely read and praised on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific, with scores of illustrations which fit the text exactly and show the mind of artist and writer in unison."—*New York Evening Post*.

"It is to be doubted whether another book can be found so thoroughly amusing from beginning to end."—*Boston Daily Advertiser*.

"For sparkling wit, irresistibly contagious fun, keen observation, absolutely poetic appreciation of natural beauty, and vivid descriptiveness, it has no recent rival."—Mrs. P. T. BARNUM's Letter to the *New York Tribune*.

"A brighter, merrier, more entirely charming book would be, indeed, difficult to find."—*St. Louis Republic*.

AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON. By SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN. With 80 Illustrations by F. H. TOWNSEND. 12mo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, \$1.50.

"One of the most naïve and entertaining books of the season."—*New York Observer*.

"The raciness and breeziness which made 'A Social Departure,' by the same author, last season, the best-read and most-talked-of book of travel for many a year, permeate the new book, and appear between the lines of every page."—*Brooklyn Standard-Union*.

"So sprightly a book as this, on life in London as observed by an American, has never before been written."—*Philadelphia Bulletin*.

"Overrunning with cleverness and good-will."—*New York Commercial Advertiser*.

"We shall not interfere with the reader's privilege to find out for herself what, after her presentation at court and narrow escape from Cupid's meshes in England, becomes of the American girl who is the gay theme of the book. Sure we are that no one who takes up the volume—which, by the way, is cunningly illustrated—will lay it down until his or her mind is at rest on this point."—*Toronto Mail*.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

PICCIOLA. By X. B. SAINTINE. With 130 Illustrations by J. F. GUELDREY. 8vo. Cloth, gilt top, uniform with "The Story of Colette" and "An Attic Philosopher in Paris," \$1.50.

"Saintine's 'Picciola,' the pathetic tale of the prisoner who raised a flower between the cracks of the flagging of his dungeon, has passed definitely into the list of classic books. . . . It has never been more beautifully housed than in this edition, with its fine typography, binding, and sympathetic illustrations."—*Philadelphia Telegraph*.

"'Picciola' is an exquisite thing, and deserves such a setting as is here given it."—*Hartford Courant*.

"The binding is both unique and tasteful, and the book commends itself strongly as one that should meet with general favor in the season of gift-making."—*Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*.

"Most beautiful in its clear type, cream-laid paper, many attractive illustrations, and holiday binding."—*New York Observer*.

AN ATTIC PHILOSOPHER IN PARIS; or, A Peep at the World from a Garret. Being the Journal of a Happy Man. By ÉMILE SOUVESTRE. With numerous Illustrations. 8vo. Cloth, gilt top, \$1.50.

"A suitable holiday gift for a friend who appreciates refined literature."—*Boston Times*.

"It possesses a charming simplicity of style that makes it extremely fascinating, while the moral lesson it conveys commends itself to every heart. The work has now become a French classic. It is beautifully gotten up and illustrated, and is a delight to the eye as well as to the mind and heart."—*Chicago Herald*.

"The influence of the book is wholly good. The volume is a particularly handsome one."—*Philadelphia Telegraph*.

"It is a classic. It has found an appropriate reliquary. Faithfully translated, charmingly illustrated by Jean Claude with full-page pictures, vignettes in the text, and head and tail pieces, printed in graceful type on handsome paper, and bound with an art worthy of Matthews, in half-cloth, ornamented on the cover, it is an exemplary book, fit to be 'a treasure for aye.'"—*New York Times*.

THE STORY OF COLETTE. A new large-paper edition. With 36 Illustrations. 8vo. Cloth, gilt top, \$1.50.

"One of the gems of the season. . . . It is the story of the life of young womanhood in France, dramatically told, with the light and shade and coloring of the genuine artist, and is utterly free from that which mars too many French novels. In its literary finish it is well-nigh perfect, indicating the hand of the master."—*Boston Traveller*.

"The binding is exquisite."—*Rochester Union and Advertiser*.

"A volume as pleasant to the eyes as the story is witching to the imagination."—*The Independent*.

"One of the handsomest of the books of fiction for the holiday season."—*Philadelphia Bulletin*.

D. APPLETON & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

DUFFELS. By EDWARD EGGLESTON, author of "The Faith Doctor," "Roxy," "The Hoosier Schoolmaster," etc. 12mo. Cloth, \$1.25.

"A collection of stories each of which is thoroughly characteristic of Dr. Eggleston at his best."—*Baltimore American*.

"Destined to become very popular. The stories are of infinite variety. All are pleasing, even fascinating, studies of the character, lives, and manners of the periods with which they deal."—*Philadelphia Item*.

THE FAITH DOCTOR. By EDWARD EGGLESTON, author of "The Hoosier Schoolmaster," "The Circuit Rider," etc. 12mo. Cloth, \$1.50.

"One of the novels of the decade."—*Rochester Union and Advertiser*.

"The author of 'The Hoosier Schoolmaster' has enhanced his reputation by this beautiful and touching study of the character of a girl to love whom proved a liberal education to both of her admirers."—*London Athenæum*.

"'The Faith Doctor' is worth reading for its style, its wit, and its humor, and not less, we may add, for its pathos."—*London Spectator*.

"Much skill is shown by the author in making these 'fads' the basis of a novel of great interest. . . . One who tries to keep in the current of good novel-reading must certainly find time to read 'The Faith Doctor.'"—*Buffalo Commercial*.

"LA BELLA" AND OTHERS. By EGERTON CASTLE, author of "Consequences." Paper, 50 cents; cloth, \$1.00.

"The stories will be welcomed with a sense of refreshing pungency by readers who have been cloyed by a too long succession of insipid sweetness and familiar incident."—*London Athenæum*.

"The author is gifted with a lively fancy, and the clever plots he has devised gain greatly in interest, thanks to the unfamiliar surroundings in which the action for the most part takes place."—*London Literary World*.

"Eight stories, all exhibiting notable originality in conception and mastery of art, the first two illustrating them best. They add a dramatic power that makes them masterpieces. Both belong to the period when fencing was most skillful, and illustrate its practice."—*Boston Globe*.

ELINE VERE. By LOUIS COUPERUS. Translated from the Dutch by J. T. GREIN. With an Introduction by EDMUND GOSSE. Holland Fiction Series. 12mo. Cloth, \$1.00.

"Most careful in its details of description, most picturesque in its coloring."—*Boston Post*.

"A vivacious and skillful performance, giving an evidently faithful picture of society, and evincing the art of a true story-teller."—*Philadelphia Telegraph*.

"The *dénouement* is tragical, thrilling, and picturesque."—*New York World*.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

D. APPLETON & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

HANDY VOLUMES OF FICTION.

Each, 12mo, flexible cloth, with special design, 75 cents.

THE TRANSLATION OF A SAVAGE. By
GILBERT PARKER.

"To tell such a story convincingly a man must have what I call the rarest of literary gifts—the power to condense. Of the good feeling and healthy wisdom of this little tale others no doubt have spoken and will speak. But I have chosen this technical quality for praise, because in this I think Mr. Parker has made the furthest advance on his previous work. Indeed, in workmanship he seems to be improving faster than any of the younger novelists."—A. T. QUILLER-ROUCH, in the *London Spectator*.

THE FAÏENCE VIOLIN. By CHAMPFLEURY.
Translated by W. H. BISHOP.

"The style is happy throughout, the humorous parts being well calculated to bring smiles, while we can hardly restrain our tears when the poor enthusiast goes to excesses that have a touch of pathos."—*Albany Times-Union*.

TRUE RICHES. By FRANÇOIS COPPÉE.

"Delicate as an apple blossom, with its limp cover of pale green and its stalk of golden rod, is this little volume containing two stories by François Coppée. The tales are charmingly told, and their setting is an artistic delight."—*Philadelphia Bulletin*.

"The author scarcely had a thought of sermonizing his readers, but each of these little stories presents a moral not easily overlooked, and whose influence lingers with those who read them."—*Baltimore American*.

A TRUTHFUL WOMAN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. By KATE SANBORN, author of "Adopting an Abandoned Farm," etc.

"The veracious writer considers the *pros* of the 'glorious climate' of California, and then she gives the *cons*. Decidedly the ayes have it. . . . The book is sprightly and amiably entertaining. The descriptions have the true Sanborn touch of vitality and humor."—*Philadelphia Ledger*.

"Those who have read Miss Kate Sanborn's book entitled 'Adopting an Abandoned Farm' will look to her new volume for vivacity and cheerful comment. They will not be disappointed, for the little book is readable from cover to cover."—*The Outlook*.

A BORDER LEANDER. By HOWARD SEELY,
author of "A Nymph of the West," etc.

"We confess to a great liking for the tale Mr. Seely tells. . . . There are pecks of trouble ere the devoted lovers secure the tying of their love-knot, and Mr. Seely describes them all with a Texan flavor that is refreshing."—*N. Y. Times*.

"A swift, gay, dramatic little tale, which at once takes captive the reader's sympathy and holds it without difficulty to the end."—*Charleston News and Courier*.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

LOUISA MÜHLBACH'S HISTORICAL
NOVELS. New edition, 18 vols. Illustrated. 12mo. Cloth,
per volume, \$1.00. Set, in box, \$18.00.

In offering to the public our *new and illustrated 12mo edition* of Louisa Mühlbach's celebrated historical romances we wish to call attention to the continued and increasing popularity of these books for over thirty years. These romances are as well known in England and America as in the author's native country, Germany, and it has been the unanimous verdict that no other romances reproduce so vividly the spirit and social life of the times which are described. In the vividness of style, abundance of dramatic incidents, and the distinctness of the characters portrayed, these books offer exceptional entertainment, while at the same time they familiarize the reader with the events and personages of great historical epochs.

The titles are as follows :

Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia.

The Empress Josephine.

Napoleon and Blucher.

Queen Hortense.

Marie Antoinette and her Son.

Prince Eugene and his Times.

The Daughter of an Empress.

Joseph II and his Court.

Frederick the Great and his Court.

Frederick the Great and his Family.

Berlin and Sans-Souci.

Goethe and Schiller.

**The Merchant of Berlin, and Maria Theresa and
her Fireman.**

Louisa of Prussia and her Times.

Old Fritz and the New Era.

Andreas Hofer.

Mohammed Ali and his House.

Henry VIII and Catherine Parr.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.



**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]



